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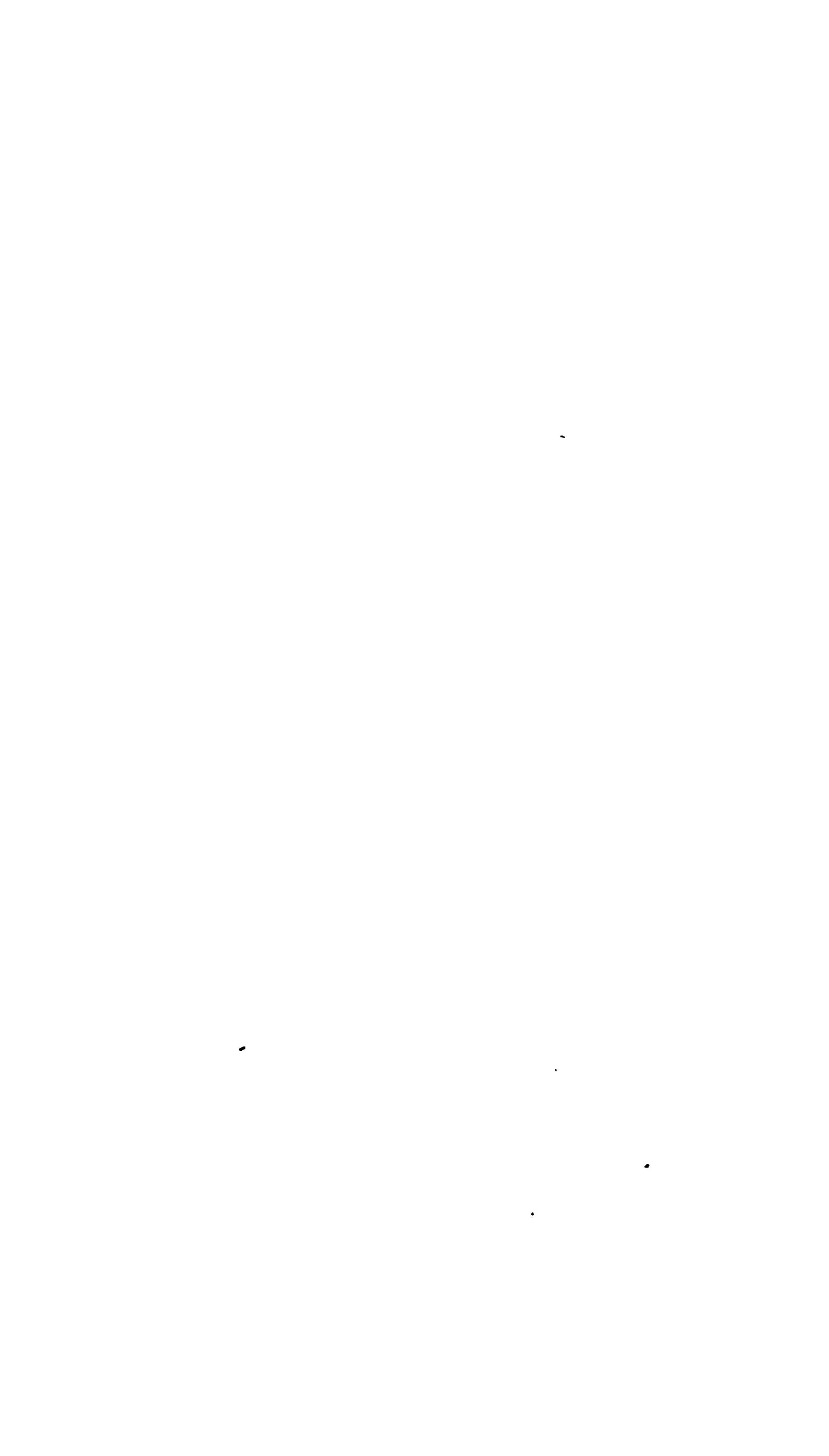
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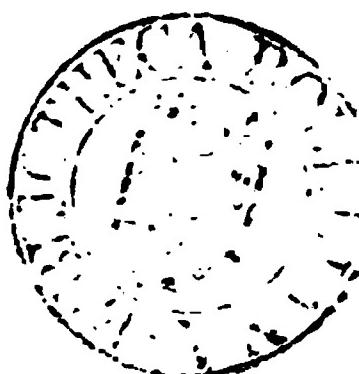
RUFUS
OR
THE RED KING
A ROMANCE

"He feared God but little—was not at all."

WILLIAM OF MALMSBURY.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I



LONDON
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INTRODUCTION.

I confess that I am far from being assured what kind of reception a tale of chivalry and feudalism may be thought to deserve in the present day from general Readers. It has been whispered to me, indeed,

"In a dark hint soft and slow,"

that a later date would have been more advisable—that the days of full-bottomed wigs—of gold canes, and laced sleeve ruffles, are more in popular odour, just now, than those of helm and hauberk. "Chivalry," as Lady Caroline Braymore says of Tom Jones, "is such a

Hack” I trust the answer to her Ladyship may still hold good ; “A Hack, Lady Caroline, which the knowing ones have warranted sound.” It was this *Hack* which made the hobby of Ariosto and Spenser, of Tasso, of Chaucer, and of Scott*—which, if Milton did not himself mount, he was delighted to see reined by others ! and which Dryden would have “turned and winded like a fiery Pegasus,” had he not been “overtaken by age, and a more insufferable evil,—want.”

The objection, however, may have great force with those who regard freshness of external form rather than internal spirit. I have only one strong ground of confidence to retire upon ;—I have not *trusted* to forms of

* “ The mightiest chiefs of British song,
Scorned not such legends to prolong ;
They gleam through Spenser’s elfin-dream,
And mix in Milton’s heavenly theme ;
And Dryden in immortal strain
Had raised the Table Round again,
But that, &c., &c.”

Marmion.

any kind ; to the “crust of antique words and images,” or to anything simply external. I have endeavoured to rely only upon the universal sympathy with man’s universal business and bosom. I have looked, if not with answering success, at least with faith and earnestness, to Truth and Nature ; and I am not afraid that they will “wear out”—that they will “lose their gloss with novelty, or their effect with fashion.”

As to the more serious objections to chivalrous subjects, they deserve, I think, little serious consideration. A modern writer has, indeed, charged “highly-coloured pictures of knighthood” with leading to “false opinions respecting the progress of general improvements, and inducing inquirers to regard present advantages as of less value than they really are.” If this is a *Utilitarian* bye-blow at the children of Utopia, I, shall merely parry it upon my own part, by an assurance that,

in the pages of “RUFUS,” the gorgeous and the gay have not overlaid the savage, the terrible, and the revolting. In this respect, at least, I am not afraid even of the judgment of those who read with the fear of the New Police before their eyes, and a discreet reverence for the Coast-guard service.

The First of this class of productions—first both in date and excellence—(it is needless to name “IVANHOE”)—was received with such transports of admiration, that a host of imitators immediately sprang up, in whose hands, the lance so gallantly shivered by the great Master, was “broken across,” with extreme and blundering awkwardness; whose productions were, to those of their prototype, as the galvanized monster in “Frankenstein” to the awakened marble of Pygmalion. I am here echoing only the general voice; not one of these prolusions having fallen in my own way; and if any living writer, except Mr. James,

(who stands high aloof,) claims honourable exception from the censure, I can only plead my honest ignorance in apology.

In resuming and completing the present work, after a long interval, I have been encouraged by the opinion of a judicious literary friend, that it is not yet too late to awaken general sympathy for our iron-clad forefathers of the early day, if the elements of good story-telling be well moulded in the attempt ; that is to say, if the interest turn wholly upon human passion, action, and suffering, and the characters are drawn like things of flesh and blood, speaking and acting as men and women (not Heroes and Heroines) may be supposed to speak and act, under the imputed circumstances, whether they wear iron or broad-cloth —hats or helmets. “ If,” said my kind adviser, “ you can give the true Promethean touch to your ‘ gorgeous Dames and Barons old,’ even the blundering failures of your pre-

decessors will not scare the public from listening to the trumpet and gazing upon the pageant. Only beware of elevating your *adjuncts* into *principals*—of labouring upon the frame instead of the picture—of supposing that dry antiquarian details will compensate for the neglected workings of the human heart. Beware of this. Construct a story of social and political interest—make your *dramatis personæ* sentient and natural—give them identity and *vraisemblance*—breathe into them, as it were, the life of the age, stormy and fierce and restless;—do all this, and you will be read and relished even by those who are heartily tired of ‘modern antiques,’ stiffened out, like old brocade, with gorgeous ornament, but ornament glittering only upon a skeleton, with no internal substance of life—no healthy pulses of feeling or of fancy—no sublimating power of Imagination to ‘bid the dry bones live.’ ”

I had the same encouragement and the same

advice from the late admired and esteemed Mr. Surtees of Mainsforth, Historian of Durham, and, many years, the warm personal friend of Scott.* His active memory and extensive learning supplied me with many materials, against the *imprudent* use of which his judgment suggested a strong caution. “Scott himself,” he observed, “has always appeared to me too much the *poet of tailors*—too intent upon jerkin and hose. Stick to human passion—deal with the great elements of humanity—show rather what your characters are *thinking* and *doing*, than how their doublets are tied and their beards trimmed. Have a care of all this, in a well-constructed narrative, and then, take my word for it, *you may dress your actors in sheepskin*, if you choose.”—“In the present day,” says the same authority, (I copy from a letter now before me,) “there is a rage amongst scribblers for being antiquarian and

* See Harold the Dauntless—“My Surtees!”—Canto 3.

precise—rigid, forsooth, in the chronology of costume; as if a laced coat or a cocked hat had never been worn a little earlier or a little later than such matters were absolutely fashionable or general!"

"Heraldry and antiquarianism," he once observed to me in conversation, "may be compared to packthread upon which pearls are strung—said packthread is in itself a sorry creature, but, as it holds together things of beauty and price, becomes dignified by association and utility. Now, upon the packthread of Heraldry, and so forth, may be strung the memories of heroic worth—the blazonry of lofty names and natures—and so far, and no farther, such things are estimable."

It is not to be supposed that Mr. Surtees denied the power of appropriate costume, manners, customs and habits, in a work of fiction; or was ignorant that they give an air of identity and verisimilitude to the characters

and incidents. He did not suppose that our old Dramas were *finer* productions, because forms and institutions, exclusively English and modern, were ascribed freely to distant countries, and even to the classical ancients. He only meant to plead against the undue preponderance—the tedious heaping together of such things, until the life of the story becomes extinct under a *caput mortuum* of inert material.

I have anxiously endeavoured to profit by the lesson. I have trusted, if the repetition may be pardoned me, nothing to matters extrinsic and external. I plead guilty, indeed, to three rather elaborately finished portraits of well-equipped warriors of the age ; but they occur in the first two chapters, and were intended to familiarise the reader, at the outset, with the picturesque aspect of a military age and world. In that respect they must be considered rather as representatives of a species,

than individuals. These, however, once fairly exhibited, I gave up emblazonry—ceased to paint arms, offensive or defensive, and exchanged the language of the valet and the virtuoso for that of universal nature. I repeat that the first two chapters contain nearly the whole of my antiquarian tediousness as to matters of attire, and surely they will as little affect the general purity of the work as the single rusty nail of Cervantes did the pipe of wine into which it had fallen.

In other respects, what I have done or left undone, I do not presume even to hint or conjecture. “I have gone,” as Hazlitt said, “through the task intended—I have done as well as I could.” History, I may be allowed to say, has done little for me. I have *invented* all but the mere naked fact of a rebellion against King William Rufus. It has been my care, however, to preserve Historical truth, and, when that failed me, Historical proba-

bility. I have availed myself, without any scruple or timidity, of those general stores long since considered the common property of romancers ; the forest and the castle, the damsel and the dwarf—the hero and the opposer — the minstrelsy and the banquet — the council and the battle. I have used them as the architect uses the columns, the bases, the capitals, the cornices, the pediments and the friezes, which a thousand and a thousand have used before him. It only remains to know whether they are so disposed, combined, and relieved as to produce once more an aspect of grace and truth, boldness and harmony—whether, in fact, the things of the world *without* are dignified by association and sympathy with the things of the world *within*—with the hopes and joys, the cares and aspirations of our common human nature.

“ *RUFUS*” is my first serious effort in composition. I do not say this as challenging

indulgence for general faults, but to suggest to severer critics some extenuation of such as are peculiarly incident to the unpractised—faults in the construction of the plot corrected by no previous experiment.

“——What is writ, is writ.
Would it were worthier !”

But I now bend with perfect submission to the award of the Public.

BISHOPWARMOUTH,
December 26, 1837.

RUFUS
OR
THE RED KING.

AVANT-PROPOS.

"Say forth thy tale, and tarry not the time."

CHAUCER.

The great father of English story-tellers,
both in verse and prose, has bequeathed, in
the words of our motto, an invaluable precept
to all his successors.

Every tourist, no doubt, has remarked with

what zest and animation he takes the wings of the morning for his career over some romantic region; how elastic the tone of his spirits—how active, buoyant and enterprising the whole frame of his mind—how acute in perception—how lively in association—how ardent in adventure and research! He could trace the windings of every stream; explore the depths of every cavern; climb every precipice; visit every ruined tower that nods over the landscape; and mark every variety of leaf and moss, of wild flower in the valley, of lichen upon the rock, of weather-stain upon the broken battlement. Every sense seems to have acquired an enlarged faculty of enjoyment; and nothing is too remote or too abundant for the grasp of his attention.

As day rolls on, the fine edge of all this wears very perceptibly away. He begins to look upon objects in the gross, and forbears to break them into detail. The *elegant* merges

in the sublime ; and the *curious* in the terrible. He looks complacently upon the pretty and the pastoral, the streamlet and the meadow,—but reserves his raptures for the cataract and the precipice, the wild, and the wonderful. Still *poetical*, he ceases to be *scientific* ; he sinks the florist ; he drops the herbalist ; he gives geology *the cut celestial*.

With the approach of evening a yet more sober and prosaic feeling

“ Deepens the murmur of the falling floods,
And breathes a brownier horror o'er the woods.”

The *religio-loci* becomes a farce ; and to every hint of adjacent *lions*, of fine old abbeys and romantic glens “ within a stone's throw,” he turns a dull eye and a deaf ear.

But when NIGHT has fairly set in, one feeling rapidly absorbs all others ; viz. a most religious longing for the end of his day's journey. Guide and Guide-book,—stream

and crag,—valley and waterfal, may all go to the devil *en masse!* for his senses are lapt in a vision of tea and toast, easy slippers, a lounge on three chairs, and a finale of hot negus and cigars! all and sundry awaiting him in that earthly paradise—the traveller's room of the Black Bull or the King's Head.

Now, it is precisely thus with the reader of a Romance. He is, at first, all vigour and freshness ; the very pattern of patience ; the model of complacency. He submits, without a murmur, to descriptions of the indescribable; endures, without a yawn, the rusty nothings of antiquarianism ; and suffers his guide, the author, to bestow all his tediousness upon him with impunity.

This is *the morning* of his jaunt. But, with Volume the second, comes the afternoon feeling of incipient weariness. He cares not a straw for antediluvian kirtles and tunics ; for the difference between chain mail and armour

of plate; between a Welsh glaive and a brown-bill. He nods over the philosophic; he dozes over the sentimental; and, oh ye “strong tedious talkers,” of the picturesque! he snores over every paragraph in which the moon glitters, and the stream murmurs.

Volume the third and last is—the *evening* and the *night*. Nothing is then endured which does not seem hurrying him to the catastrophe with the velocity of an enchanter’s griffin. “*C'est le fin qui couronne le tout.*” He curses the writer by his gods for every single step out of the high road to that most welcome of caravaries—THE END.

Courteous Reader! in our present Utopian jaunt it is fully more than noon-day with us, and we are now bent to make, if possible, practical application of our own exordium. “Be blithe, therefore,” as Ancient Pistol hath it; “bristle thy courage up!” and admire with

what a sustained, unbreathing celerity we
hurry to the goal !

“ Like quarrell shot from steel cross-bow
Forth launch'd, on our career we go !”

RUFUS.

CHAPTER I.

"The eyes of your imagination must endeavour to reach men through the distance of ages, and represent them to us living and acting on that soil where even the dust of their crumbling relics is no longer to be found. Imagine old England once more peopled with its invaders and its vanquished of the eleventh century—figure to yourselves the former, proud and fortunate, the latter, invoking death as more tolerable than slavery. Seven hundred years have already passed away since these men ceased to breathe—since their hearts ceased to beat with pride or suffering. But what is this to the imagination? which knows no past, and to which even the future is present!"—*Thierry's History of the Conquest*.

FOR some time after the Norman Conquest, the political and social state of the English nation (we speak of the purely native English) might be compared either to that of the men

of Rabbah, and of the cities of the children of Ammon, under saws, and harrows, and axes of iron ; or to the condition of the lost spirits in Dante's Malebolge, when rent and flayed by the demoniac flesh-hooks of

“ Fang'd Ciriatto—Graffiacane fierce,
And Farfarello, and mad Rubicant !”

Every reader, of course, is aware of this to a certain extent, but, as the incidents of the following story had their rise and progress during that stormy period, we shall venture, for the benefit of all indifferent memories, to snatch a brief prefatory glance at the more striking features of its convulsion. It will, at least, enable us to see clearly under what blessed auspices the mixed subjects of King William Rufus saw the gripe of that fiery monarch close upon the iron sceptre of his father.

The industrious tyranny of the Conqueror completed with a heavy hand that sweeping work of confiscation, by which the whole body of English nobility and clergy was hurled from rank and authority, and their possessions lavished upon Norman barons and Italian priests. Both revolutions were, no doubt,

hailed by the victors with loud pæans to the superior valour, courtesy and refinement of the former, and to the excelling learning and sanctity of the latter. In common prudence, indeed, to say nothing of gratitude, both classes of winners manifested abundant zeal for their royal patron. The laity spared no cruelty which could weaken yet further the groaning Saxons, and the clergy were not slow to strike with the canonical axe in the common cause. So that even a warm friend of the first William confesses, that “the foreigners formed a close league, bearing upon one another just as upon the body of the infernal dragon, scale is laid over scale.” Nor did the evils of despotism emanate only from the higher sources, “dogs in authority,” strove everywhere to mimic the arrogance and cupidity of their superiors. Contemporary writers, indeed, seem at a loss for terms sufficiently expressive of the prevailing enormities; they speak indignantly of ignoble squires, and impure vagabonds disposing at pleasure of the best young females; shedding blood for very wantonness, snatching the last morsel from the mouth of the unfortunate, and seizing upon everything within the grasp

of their rapacity. "Frantic wretches!" exclaims one of these honest chroniclers, "they wondered at their own acts, and went mad with pride and astonishment!"

Even the inferior landholders, the franklins or rural proprietors, who had either resisted at Hastings, or subsequently, upon a pettier scale, fell the victims of their unavailing patriotism; while, of the few who had not thus provoked destruction, it may be supposed the condition was sufficiently wretched. Some, at a dear rate, purchased uncertain protection from a neighbouring tyrant; others, barricadoed their houses as if for a siege, and nightly, amidst their families, prayed aloud for defence from the spoilers. Some, reduced to penury by long exaction and pillage, became, at last, for a little bread, the menial slaves of men who, from obscure or infamous adventurers, had suddenly sprung to wealth and rank amidst the horrors of the conquest. Such, indeed, was the extent of this last Norman dispensation of tender mercies, that besides including the great mass of the rustic population, and supplying thousands of dependents to the great abbeys, victims yet remained in abundance for an extensive foreign

hand even upon the proud nobles who aped their master's adoption, and, no doubt, bred much of that haughty discontent which vented itself ultimately in more than one rebellion. Many, in fact, regarded with a secret preference the claim of Duke Robert to his brother's crown, and for the better security of their own possessions on both sides of the channel, would gladly have seen one lord-paramount sway at once both the kingly and ducal sceptres.

If, to these fruitful causes of evil we add a general neglect of tillage, with its natural attendant, famine—the bigotry of the old, the profligacy of the young, and the moral ignorance of *all*—some idea may be formed of that jarring state of things which we have thus endeavoured to premise.

Upon the fiery and reckless spirit of the RED KING, however, all these accruing evils lay like morning dew upon the leafy monarchs of the forest. With little of the refinement, but all the chivalrous daring of a good knight and true of that knightly age, he found in the distraction of his realm a fitter theatre for adventurous career than in the repose of a well-ordered state; ardent in the

pursuit both of pleasure and of business, he brooked no interruption of the one from the earnestness or levity of the other; and at the precise period of our story's commencement, not even the disastrous close of a campaign against the Welsh (to pursue which he had thrown up the war in Normandy) could either defer or lessen the splendour of his preparations for the regal festival of Pentecost in the good old city of Winchester.

CHAPTER II.

"What! yet another of the ravening horde
Of foreign spoilers! Rapine's mailed disciples—
The listeners of the mercenary lance—
The never-sated gorgers of the fat,
And drunkards with the strong. True children they
Of the swell'n daughters of the horse-leech, whose
Cry everlasting is " Give ! give !" A curse
Heavy and grinding as the wrongs we suffer,
Cling to them all ! the Norman and his tools !
And trampled into darker bondage still
Be every Saxon slave who prays not thus !"

The Vale of Sanglec.

Our scene opens amidst the woodlands of Southern England; in one of those districts forming, at the period we treat of, the most favoured portion of her royal forestry. Sloping so gently from the uplands as scarcely to deserve the name of a valley, the sylvan ground to which we more peculiarly direct the reader made, however, the nearest approach to such, of any spot between the Channel coast and Winchester.

It was the noon of a summer's day. All in the sequestered glade was mute and stirless,

except the song of a few birds—the still flow of a brook—the hum of insect life, which seems rather to deepen than to disturb silence—the waving of foliage in a light breeze, and the shadows of clouds that drifted spirit-like before it, hurrying over bank and wood, and chequering them with a hundred changeful effects of light and shadow. One moment such was the noon-tide hush and quiet; in the next they were broken by the neigh of a courser and the clank of steel, and a mounted traveller, solitary, as it seemed, rode heedfully down the mild declivity.

The appearance of the cavalier who broke thus picturesquely upon the still life of the landscape, was at once striking and prepossessing. He was well armed from head to foot, and had that sort of seat upon the war-saddle which indicated a long familiarity with its occupation. He seemed, however, to be little past what is commonly considered the hey-day of youth, if, indeed, that climacteric had not been prolonged as well as anticipated by constitutional ardour; as was strongly suggested by the fire of a quick dark eye, a cheek and brow unroughened except by military exposure to sun and blast, and, above all, glancing over fea-

tures irregularly handsome, the spirit of adventurous levity, the laughing genius of impudence, proper only to the period of untamed passion and restless desire. Something of voluptuousness there was, but certainly allied neither to the cruel nor the effeminate. In short, it was a bold, frank, happy countenance, full of mercurial life, good-humour, and imper-turbable self-confidence.

His equipments, offensive and defensive, were those of a knight, or well-accoutred man-at-arms of the time. First, a gambeson, or cumbrous inner vestment of woollen, so thickly quilted as to deaden the stroke of a battle-axe. Over this, a hauberk of double chain-mail, that is to say, a complete flexible dress of steel-rings interlaced, and bedded upon strong linen. The upper or body-part of this “excellent garment of durance” might, for removal, open in front, like a modern coat, but was always worn closed and fast clasped, and riveted. Appended to it was a hood or cap of the same linked construction, which protected both neck and head, although the latter was still further secured by a powerful conical helmet, truncated as if for the very purpose of receiving a hostile blow with its

full vigour, instead of glancing it off as might be supposed desirable. With this exception, however, the defence was very perfect; the *chausses*, or mailed hose, fitting tight to the limbs, like pantaloons, passed also over the feet, while the terminations of the hauberk-sleeves were joined by *mannekins*, or mailed gloves of like texture.

Grasped in the right hand, and poised in the *rest* below, he carried a long and powerful lance, the redoubtable weapon of Norman chivalry; a *gonfanon*, or light streamer fluttering from its head. In aid of this, a heavy, straight-bladed, cross-handled sword, was suspended from the left side of a buff baldric, charged less cumbrously upon the right with a “dagger of mercy,” “*un petit couteau, nommè un misericorde.*” A formidable iron mace bung at the saddle-bow, and from the *gorget*, or neck-part of the mailed hood, a convex triangular shield, bearing for its device a broken lance wreathed round with laurel. When it is added that the person thus “girded gallantly” was of the medium stature, best fitted for prolonged exertion, and mounted upon a horse of great spirit and beauty, we have painted pretty faithfully the very chivalrous exterior of Sir

Alberic du Coci, one of the many adventurers execrated in our motto, and who were drawn to merry England, as to a common centre, by the well-known liberality of its monarch.

Such as we have endeavoured to describe him, the knight now rode briskly along an esplanade of beautiful turf, bordering the course of the brook, already mentioned, and which flowed through the whole length of the valley. Almost immediately, however, as if from the impulse of a sudden recollection, the career of his Bucephalus was again checked, and, while the noble animal impatiently wounded the smooth emerald of the sward, the rider, raising himself in the stirrup, scanned the prospect around with a heedful eye. It seemed to be the result of this scrutiny that he drew his bridle to the right, and diverged from his intended course; at the same time blowing upon a small bugle a keen and shrill note. The purport of this signal-blast was not immediately obvious, but an answer was at length given by the appearance of another rider upon the brow of the same gentle eminence from which Du Coci had himself descended. He rode down with more precipitation than prudence warranted, and not

without one or two admonitory stumbles, which it required all the skill of a dexterous horseman to retrieve. Foot and hand, however, did their office, and the new-comer speedily drew rein in safety by the side of Sir Alberic.

Now, between these travellers the difference of rank was scarcely less manifest in bearing and general expression, than in the more adventitious circumstances of dress and equipments. It is true the esquire (for such was the last arrived) bestrode his steed fairly; and in point of age, was at least *ten* summers in the rear of his master. Still there was a want of that indefinable something which accompanies, and either reveals or implies high birth, with its long-familiar habits of authority and command. He wore a *bacinet*, or light open helmet, and a coat, or rather shirt of mail, lacking the knightly appendages of sleeves, hood, or chausses. His weapons were sword, poniard, and mace, and he carried also a *roundel*, or circular light shield, studded with broad nails. Although not wanting in indications of strength and activity, his figure was of that ordinary kind which attracts no observation, but his features were, on the other hand, sufficiently remarkable; the more so for

a tyro of chivalry that they belonged in character and expression to the peculiar physiognomy of that scattered race from whose despised and persecuted children proud knight-hood was least likely to choose the neophytes of its order. In plain terms, the face of Sir Alberic's esquire was decidedly *Jewish*. There was the high aquiline nose—the darkly sallow complexion—the depressed cheek—the elevated forehead—the keen black eye, and an abundant expression of the imputed worldly craft of a child of the promise ; dashed, however, and strangely, with the lines of eccentric whim and mischievous oddity ; so that the whole countenance seemed alive with busy, prying impudence, and spoke rather, perhaps, of humour running riot (with little heed to time, place, or person), and of light, ingenious knavery, chuckling over its adroitness, than of the keen plodding of a genuine bargain-maker.

Du Coci, who with half-reverted head had watched his descent and approach, accosted him, as he rode within ear-shot, thus :—

“ Betwixt thee and thy steed, friend Nicholas, who shall decide ? ”

“ Touching what points, sir knight ? ” queried the retainer.

"Marry," said the lord, "thy halting judgment, and his stumbling paces."

"God send us both better masters!" retorted Nicholas, "and with that blessing we will amend; but touching my judgment, halt or not halt, I see not yet that it hath missed any path which your knightly wit can discover in this pleasant penfold."

"Why, thou hooded buzzard!" said the knight, "look around thee!"

And as he spoke they doubled some huge oaks and beeches, and came at once upon a wider prospect and a beaten horsetrack.

"Now by our Lady!——" ejaculated the squire.

"*Our* Lady!" interrupted his lord—"Out upon thee! what hast *thou* to do with good christian oaths, that hast well nigh utterly forgotten the very spot where thine infidel lips first uttered 'Ave Maria!' *Thou* swear by the blessed Virgin! pish! Swear me, if thou must needs swear, by the beard of Abraham, or the bones of Jacob, or the staff of Isaac, or such other misbelieving oath as may smack strongest of the synagogue!"

"If a man," said Nicholas, "hath one special good gift fairer than another, it is like

the heron's best plume, ever the first to be plucked away. Why, I remember me to a foot's breadth, the very ground whereon I had ever the grace to do a good thing; the more surely that such have chanced rarely with me, since I followed a leader of free-lances."

"As rarely," cried Sir Alberic, "as calves are littered with six legs."

"Very like," responded the candid Nicholas—"but as for swearing—by the faith of my body! I will swear for a summer's day with the best Christian—aye, the best *Norman* Christian that ever pattered a Credo while plundering a Saxon abbey! But by pyx and chalice!" he continued, "ye did well, Sir Alberic, to play your own guide ere I had led ye blunderingly into the wilder depths of yon eternal forest! this, indeed, is a fair hap and a strange, to regain our lost road in this 'valley of conversion,' as the snuffling prior of St. Mary's called it, when, under this very beech, and with a helm-full from yonder brook, he cleansed me from the filth of Judaism—nay, I remember his holy jargon, and how he blessed our Lady and St. Benedict, that he had brought so goodly a lamb into the fold."

"A goodly jack-an-ape he brought," replied Du Coci, "as ever grinned at his own mopping and mowing. But, in fair earnest," added the knight, as they rode under the magnificent branches of the old beech—"I bethink me it was indeed under this very tree that thou forsworest thy beard before thou hadst it, and wert transmewed from the jewish lout Simeon, to the christian varlet Nicholas."—

"Thereby," rejoined the squire, "bringing me (as the old proverb hath it) out of God's blessing into the warm sun. Verily, for ought of good that hath been in my path since I took to blade and buckler, I might as well have turned pagan outright."

"And hadst thou indeed been a black-browed slave of Mahound," replied the knight, "I warrant thee thou hadst thought thyself no unmeet page for the disgraced and luckless Du Coci, who, when he first beheld thy Israelitish visage, even in this valley of villainous remembrances, surveyed it from forth a horse-litter, where he lay like a sick monk, or a bed-ridden crone, unable to wield lance, or bestride steed, while quitting the land where he had lost shield, saddle, and stirrup before the lance of a traitor! By'r Lady, an ugly recollec-

tion!"—And for a moment or two, as he indulged these tristful reminiscences, something like a cloud hung upon the good knight's brow.—His facetious and very familiar dependent, however, rejoined with little sympathy for the unwonted mood;—

"Truly, master mine, ye were in sorry trim that blessed evening for pricking and prancing; still worse, as the fiend would have it, for being daintily curious in choice of vassals.—I remember me a mad fellow who journeyed by at the time, swearing that ye might jumble your litter-load of broken bones to the gates of Jericho, and fare worse at the journey's end. Ye looked as tho' ye had run a tilt with Death, and gotten a shrewd thrust of old Barebone's lance under the fifth rib! As for the traitor ye talk of——"

"Well, sirrah?" interrupted his lord, "what of him in the great abundance of thy wit? what of Robert de Mowbray?"

"Why, that be he traitor or true man, men say he is on the bright side of the wall now, and they who would walk in the same blessed sun-light, must cry him mercy with doffed cap, and have a care how their shadow falls, lest it offend."

"By St. George!" exclaimed Du Coci, "I will doff neither cap nor casque, were he the best De Mowbray of his race, and the boldest court-climber that ever toiled up the slippery steeps of ambition! there be who have clambered higher than an earldom and yet dashed themselves to pieces ere their weary feet could reach a resting-place."

"A good rede! a good rede!" said the squire, "and sounding the more especially wise in the mouth of one who is even now about to strain foot, hand, and knee up that said slippery steep."

"And in good time, friend Nicholas, or the day may go by when a brave lance may find work or guerdon in this fair realm of England. Seven winters have stripped these branching giants of their verdure since De Mowbray and myself ran that accursed course in the lists at Gloucester, and little do I now bring back to the shores from whence that luckless encounter drove me, save a commodity of iron thewes and sinews under a good hauberk—thy busy, meddling self, Nicholas de L'Epee—and yon round score of plundering knaves, whom we have left, with never a groat, malcontent at Dover! As stout a band of free

lances, and with as little of honesty or remorse, as ever fought under a poor gentleman's banner!"

"By Saint George!" rejoined the squire, "I think they would fight under it at the gates of hell for pay and plunder; but I see not what *that* avails us if your exchequer lies yet in unknown purses. They be rare dancers to the golden pipe; but ye may as well look to see the towers of Dover in marching array as a single lance of them pricking after ye without fair security for speedy payment, and something in pouch the whilst, to the boot of that."

"Well," said Du Coci, "the devil that tempts me upward shall furnish the wings to soar withal. But what a cold-lived, false-breasted villain art thou, to prate thus! Why, thou son of a race of mammon! thou that wert born in usury, and swaddled in extortion; cradled amongst shekels, and fed with bezants! canst thou open no golden wicket in this extremity, to let in hope? Or must I indeed believe what thou hast ever told me with such a lying leer, that the whole tribe of thy long-bearded, pawn-exacting kindred have gone down to the place of their unbelieving fathers? What, man! for once in thy life do the foul

fiend a shrewd turn, and speak two words of truth ! Say, hast thou no yellow-capped sire or kinsman in yonder goodly city of Winchester, from whose ill-gotten treasure heaps thou mightest conjure a few accursed coins to help me in this evil pinch ? ha ! ”

To this address, which, however lightly spoken, had at least sufficient earnestness in its matter, the squire replied with a smile of very doubtful significance, saying,

“ I pray you, Sir Alberic du Coci, with all reverence, to push on for Winchester, where I will know what winds are like to blow over us ere I say or unsay. If ye list to believe me —so : if not, why—so again. But take *this* with you, sir knight of the broken lance ; I will let no man dip a finger-point into the pasty of *my* counsel until I have thrust my whole hand into *his*. ”

The knight laughed aloud at this flourish of consequential mystery, and said, as they resumed the brisker pace which this colloquy had slackened :—

“ Set on, sir knave ! thy brow and bearing are too brazen to give token of better metal ; yet, beware that ye be not some day put to a rough alchemy ! Meanwhile I would we were

at the blessed gate of Saint Mary's, that we might wash down the dust of our mid-day travel with a cup of especial Rhenish—

" ' The jolly monk's guest
Ever quaffs of the best.'

Our Lady grant that these unquiet times have not marred the good fathers' kitchen-craft, and broken the cellarer's key!"

This natural apprehension effectually quickened their rate of travel, and, before hazarding another speculation as to the hospitable capabilities of Saint Mary's, they gained the termination of the valley, from whence a narrow defile ascended to the upland glade of one of those vast forest-tracts, covering at that time almost all the southern districts of Hampshire.

CHAPTER III.

"Tell us your faction," said one; "for whom are you?"

"Tell me first," said the soldier, "for whom are you? the strongest party should speak first."

"We are for God and the king," replied the other.

"I am for God and my standard!" answered the single rider.

A Legend of Montrose.

"That defence thou hast, betake thee to it. Thy interceptor, full of despight, bloody as the hunter, hath in him what pride, strength, skill and wrath can furnish man withal—soul and body will he divorce! His incensement is so implacable that satisfaction can be none but by pangs of death and sepulchre!"

Twelfth Night, Act III. Sc. 4.

IMMEDIATELY upon gaining the open glade, our travellers looked upon a fair and busy scene. At some distance, on the one hand, a long train of riders appeared winding amongst the huge oaks and elms, between whose mighty trunks the road took its beautifully sylvan direction. Only the rear of the party was in sight; but the power and consequence of its leader were suggested by the yet visible numbers, and by the splendour of their equipments

and housings, which glittered in the noon-day sun.

A little to the right, but moving in the same general direction, a second band rode onward in very gallant array, under two banners bearing different devices, and led by two knights, who, by the sudden issuing of Du Coci from the defile, were placed almost side by side with that adventurer. A stronger contrast, perhaps, could not be conceived than was exhibited by the appearance of these cavaliers in every respect. The oldest, a man of at least forty-five, tall, square-built, muscular and athletic in figure, and of a stern and gloomy countenance, was (notwithstanding the lapse of several years) immediately recognised by Sir Alberic as the potent HUGH DE MONTGOMERY, Earl of Shrewsbury and Arundel, and, at the period we treat of, LORD HIGH MARSHAL of England, the third office of rank and power in a feudal kingdom. A bold and successful soldier, he had forfeited none of the advantages bequeathed him by his father, Roger de Belesme, who, for his services at Hastings, and as a kinsman of the Conqueror, had received from that monarch almost the whole of Shropshire, and about

one hundred and sixty manors in other parts of the realm, together with the title of Earl of Shrewsbury, on his subduing Edric Sylvaticus, the Saxon noble of that addition.

The superstitious remorse of Earl Roger in his declining years, reared a magnificent abbey in his city of Shrewsbury, and, finally, drew him to its cloisters in fancied expiation of a long previous life of violence and horror. The earldom and the marshalship then devolved upon his second son Hugh, in whom, it must be confessed, the ferocious honours of the sire found no unmeet guardianship. The hardy Cambrians, indeed, from whom he wrung Cardigan and the greater part of Powis-land, and whom he and his brother Arnulph are said to have “torn with claws of iron,” had, at the period of our story’s commencement, taken no common vengeance upon these and other of their Anglo-Norman oppressors.

In vain had Rufus given the royal sanction to his barons to hold whatever lands they could conquer from the Welsh, and countenanced the little less than regal authority of the first lord marchers, who, in their castle of Cardiff, kept their chancery, exchequer and

court in imitation of an actual monarch, exercising “*Jura regalia*” in all cases except the power of granting pardon for treason. In vain had these powerful barons toiled to secure their conquests by the erection or repair of strong castles at Bristol, Gloucester, Shrewsbury, Chester, &c., &c., as a chain of military posts upon the frontier; everywhere the unbroken spirit of the mountaineers rose against the usurpers. Their desperation foiled even the energy of the Red King himself, and, in fact, he had just returned in discomfiture to celebrate the great Festival of Pentecost, which, opportunely demanding his presence in Winchester, took something from the apparent disgrace of the retreat.

The tide of victory then rolled with unbroken force upon the march-wardens, who were all driven with great slaughter into England. The chieftains of North Wales joining the sons of Cadwgan-ap-Bleddyn (a prince of Powis) carried death and havoc before them over the English frontier; nor did the fury of the torrent subside until many a powerful fortress had fallen into their avenging hands, and, amongst others, the strong hold of Earl Hugh—Montgomery

Castle—of which the garrison was put to the sword without remorse, and the building itself burned to ashes.

After such humiliating mishap, well might the countenance of *Hugh Goch* (as the Welsh called him for the redness of his hair) look doubly stern and gloomy when presented to Sir Alberic as we have stated.

In point of defensive equipment, this formidable warrior exhibited, probably, the utmost fulness and perfection which the age had attained. For this reason, and because we do not intend in subsequent instances to bestow our antiquarian tediousness upon the reader, as to mere externals, we will venture here to describe pretty minutely Montgomery's appearance in the eye of Du Coci. He wore, then, a hauberk of *trellised mail*, as it was termed, the first seen in the kingdom, studded with knobs of steel, over a thickly-quilted gambeson, and between these a plastron or breastplate of hammered iron. The hood or head-piece of the hauberk, was surmounted by the *chapelle de fer*; a wide iron conical cap, without a *nasal* or defence of any kind for the face; but a squire, who rode behind, carried upon his saddlebow a huge, heavy,

cylindrical helmet, having a face-guard of wrought plate, perforated with two crosses for the eyes, nostrils, and mouth, and which cumbrous piece of protection is only used in the shock of battle.

Another squire bore a mighty lance, such as few hands could have guided in an encounter, the stave of extraordinary length, and the fluted blade upwards of a foot long, and at least nine inches in breadth. In his own grasp was another, somewhat lighter, having a gon-fanon streaming from its head. A massy *heater* shield hung from his neck ; and, in addition to the usual sword and poniard, he wore, at the left saddle-bow, another of the former species of weapon, long, and sharp pointed, such as was afterwards called *l'epée à l'estoc*. But, besides all this, even the addition of a heavy mace or mallet of arms (an iron missile, something resembling an old-fashioned chocolate mill in shape) was not thought sufficient to exclude a ponderous battle-axe, which seemed to demand the arm of a giant to wield it. He rode a huge black charger, the gift of a Flemish knight, in whose country the breed of giant coursers was then beyond all rivalry the finest. The powerful

animal was barbed from head to crupper, that is to say, armed in a style worthy of its rider, for, although the refinements of defensive skill had not yet *generally* extended to horse as well as man, yet did the bulky steed of Earl Hugh exhibit some rude promise of that tremendous panoply under which the steeds of subsequent cavaliers rushed upon lance and stake.

Something there was about all this ostentatious fulness of equipment scarcely compatible with the peaceful entry into a metropolis, or the well-known bravery of the person displaying it; a quality to which, however, none had asserted a more successful claim, although dimmed by the fierce vices which too frequently tarnish military reputation.

In strong contrast to the Earl of Shrewsbury rode SIR ILBERT DE TUNBRIDGE, a Baron of Pictou, who certainly, far more than his sombre and overloaded companion, resembled one journeying—

“ Where throngs of knights and barons bold,
In weeds of peace high triumphs hold.”

His scarlet riding attire was of the finest materials which the looms of Flanders could supply, lined with the richest sable, and as

courtly in its fashion as the greatest stickler for exterior elegance could desire. The cloak, although like the garment immortalised in Scottish song, “in longitude ‘twas sorely scanty,” and fully meriting on that account the well-known philippic of Charlemagne, was yet of no more than strictly fashionable brevity. A bonnet, or cap of cloth of gold, with three heron’s plumes secured in front, sat lightly on a well-formed head, from which hung a profusion of dark curls, then as much the abomination of the severer clergy as in the days of a latter and worse monarch, when the precise Prynne anathematized that very fashion from the pulpit. The rich tunic of this tasteful and *recherché* wearer was fastened at the waist by a silken baldric, supporting a light sword and poniard, both hilts richly inlaid; but, excepting these costly weapons, the gay cavalier was altogether unarmed.

We will further venture to particularize two characteristic appendages of Sir Ilbert’s gay exterior: First, a richly embroidered hawking-glove, worn upon the left hand, and upon which he carried a favourite Norway falcon of great value, such as, in the sportsman’s phrase, would have “stooped at a crane,” and was then thought

no insignificant present even to a monarch. Secondly, the knight's *boots* of courtly maroquine, the peaked ends of which were fantastically curled upwards to a preposterous length, and the extremities attached by chains of silver to the knees. A monstrous fashion, against which, as well as the "unloveliness of love-locks," the thunders of the church were vainly directed. They continued, indeed, in defiance of spiritual fulminations, to be so long admired by all high-bred gallants, that we are told of the Austrian cavalry before the battle of Sempach,

"The *peaks* they hewed from their boot-points
Might almost load a wain!"

Upon the whole, the Knight of Pictou displayed as much of the *softer* vanities of this life as did the Earl of Shrewsbury of the more fierce and active. There was at least as much of the luxurious and effeminate as could be well counterbalanced by fair horsemanship, a goodly figure, and manly features, especially as the latter, in their general expression, might have suggested to a keen observer a light and sanguine spirit, impatient of reproof, tenacious of petty regards, and easily susceptible of irritation. Something, too, might have been dis-

cerned of vacillation and irresolution ; the wandering and the perplexity of a proud weak mind, jealous of the opinions and respect of others, but incompetent to influence or command them.

Behind these powerful nobles rode several knights of lesser name and fame, yet all gallantly arrayed and attended more or less by their men-at-arms, archers, squires, varlets, and grooms. The great body of the cavalcade, however, was made up of the immediate household and retainers of Earl Hugh and De Tunbridge.

No sooner had the quick eye of Montgomery caught a glance of Du Coci than he exclaimed (in no silver tones)—

“ *Diablezot ! Sir Knight !* methinks I have seen that head of thine ere now upon the shoulders of Alberic du Coci ? ”

“ Now the Lord preserve it there ! ” answered the gallant, “ it were ill parting with so old a friend, and I trust the rather to have met one in the noble Montgomery, who, perchance, will not hold that if a good hand be once stricken down, it should, therefore, never lift up finger again.”

“ By our Lady, no ! ” said the rough soldier,

"if the mishap chanced not from craven-heart,
I would rather put fresh steel in its gripe.
But where hast thou been serving thy master,
Satan, this many a day?"

"Nay," replied the adventurer, "I have fought under his banner as sparingly as a poor gentleman might, seeing that, in point of worldly guerdon, the foul-fiend hath ever a more open hand than our Lady and the saints; nevertheless, in more countries than one, I have been fain to serve Heaven so as not to offend St. Nicholas."

"And where last, I pray you?" queried Montgomery.

"In the land of the vine, Sir Earl; in merry France, where a man may prick his courser from cock-crow to sun-down, through vineyard and orchard, instead of such a howling wilderness, such a thirsty desert of oak and beech-wood as this."

"Gramercy, sir traveller," said the Earl, "what dost thou then in this poor realm of England?"

"Marry, I ride upon its free turf, and feed upon its free air, for lack of better employ and more solid repast. But, by the beard of Pendragon, I would that I (simple as I ride here)

had been King of France for a brief space in lieu of Philip the Fat, when our own hot-browed William the Red, strove to pluck off Duke Robert's crown ; and thou, Montgomery, and the constable De Miles, and I wot not who else of your island-chivalry, gave your spread banners to the gales of Normandy ! ”

“ And what *then*, sir knight ? ” said De Tunbridge, with a jealous haughtiness, for he also had been amongst the number of those who backed the Red King in his recent unjust aggression upon his brother Robert, when the alliance of France with the latter was *bought off* by the splendid bribes of RUFUS. To this Du Coci alluded, when he replied—

“ *Then*, had I known whether it be fairer to be thrust out of the saddle with *steel or gold*. And, moreover, the rust of emptiness had been scoured out of my coffers, which, I think, are like to be eaten through with it, unless it please Heaven to replenish them by mercy especial ! Under the glutton Philip, a man of action may fritter his body away, flesh and fell, without so much recompense as an acre of barren earth, with as many stones as would build up a black prison of a tower to starve his lean-jawed vassals in ! and call it a *castle*, good lack ! By

our Lady ! when it was bruited that Duke Robert was like to lose the fairest feather of his wing, *I* bethought me of striking a good blow in his cause ; but, beshrew ye all—French, Norman, and English, I had scarce ridden within lance-length of the frontiers, when ye must needs dance to the drowsy pipe of fat Madame Peace ! Away went William the Red, and the rest of ye, to lay load upon the Welch kernes ; he of the short hose, I mean Duke Robert, to his fair leman of Alençon ; Philip, the huge-bellied, hiccupping back to his gormandize, with unbuckled mail ; and I, Alberic du Coci, to call in levies with a light hand for my own peculiar, amongst fat-brained burgesses and scoundrelly jack-peasants ! ”

“ I tell thee, Du Coci,” said *Hugh Goch*, “ that these Welch kernes, as thou callest them, have done right fairly for King Philip’s exchequer, and for Duke Robert’s cities and castles ; but, by Heaven and our Lady ! they have done marvellously ill for William of England and his peers ! as thou mightst have known to thy cost (as well as others), if thou hadst not preferred marauding amongst French clowns and Flemish pedlars, to jeopardizing that

fair body of thine with us upon the mountains of Western Britain."

"Make me constable of thy castle of Montgomery, noble Hugh," cried the adventurer, "and I will hold it for thee against all Powisland! there shall not come the twang of a Welsh bow, nor the glimmer of a Welsh glaive within a fair league of its battlements!"

"Seek thy constablership amongst blackened ashes and smoking ruin!" said the earl, with a dark look. "Montgomery Castle hath gone to the four winds of heaven in whirling flame—God's curse be upon their heads that fired it! Better or braver wilt thou never be, Du Coci, than Reginald Fitzwalter, who was my seneschal in that goodly hold, and had as stout a garrison at his beck as ever plied cross-bow and mangonel upon a besieging host! Yet, hath he fallen beneath the blazing ruins of his Keep, and there escaped not one of his band to say, 'Thus fell Fitzwalter and Montgomery!'"

"Now, by St. George!" exclaimed Sir Alberic, "that was indeed an evil hap! and a deadly reward do ye owe the workers thereof when time shall serve!"

"If I repay it not, be the blood of Reginald Fitzwalter upon me!" said Earl Hugh.

“ Meanwhile, not with me alone rests the shame of unavenged repulse ; others are as deep in the red debt as I—my brother Arnulph of Pembroke—stout Bernard Newmarch of Brecknock—yon misproud Earl of Chester—the sleek Hugo d’Abringes, who rides so sullenly before us there. These, and other of the marchers, have all their portion in the hot labour of vengeance.”

“ Which the blessed saints hasten, say I ! ” cried the knight of the broken lance. “ But I marvel that King William kept not his oath as touching these cat-a-mountain Welsh ; it was told me by one of Anjou, that he had sworn by St. Luke’s face never to turn his charger’s head eastward, till he had ground them as ‘twere betwixt the upper and nether millstone.”

“ Marry, sir,” said Montgomery, “ it was a foolish selling of the wolf before the chase began. But thus did his father, the conquering Bastard. I remember me when the stout men of Dol dropt their portcullis in his teeth, how he swore, by the splendour of God, never to pass from beneath their towers, until his banner floated above them ; and yet, ere the world was a day older, up came the lances of Bretagne to the rescue, and many a fair mile

did William put betwixt his charger's hoofs and the gates of Dol ! Tush, tush—'tis an ill habit swearing by saints and martyrs, to break this and to bend that, when, God wot, the stoutest arm that ever wielded a battle-axe may be cleft off, by the shoulder blade, ere it strikes another blow. And yet"—continued the grim speaker, with a slight change of voice, "yet can I tell of an oath that, if matters turn not out the fairer, may have an ill import for *thee*, Alberic du Coci!"

"Aye, marry!" said he of the broken lance, "and what may *that* be, I pray you?"

"It was sworn," replied Montgomery, "as I have heard, upon St. Cuthbert's altar-stone, at Durham ; and, if thou wilt send thy wits so far northward, I warrant they will bring thee back a shrewd guess, *by whom?*"

"Never an ill shaft from thence," exclaimed Du Coci, "rapped upon *my* mail, but there was one the less in the quiver of De Mowbray—ha?"

"Well, look to it, sir knight," rejoined Earl Hugh—"he is Earl of Northumberland, and hath fearful potency. A king and a king's son hath he stricken down, at the head of their armed thousands, since thou and he tilted at Gloucester. Malcolm of Scotland, and his

fair son have bloody graves in De Mowbray's earldom. Have a care, good Alberic! He hates thee with a deadly hate, and hath the long arm of power, which may reach from Bamborough to Winchester, and strike thy head from its prop, an' if thou keep it not the more heedfully."

"At least," replied the leader of free lances, "it shall not be *puffed* off my shoulders with big words, were they sworn upon the holiest rood in Britain, and by the best lips moreover that breathe within its four seas! Speak out, Sir Earl! *What* hath Robert de Mowbray sworn in the fair aisles of Durham, *as ye have heard?*"

"Marry," replied the marshal, with something of a malicious smile upon his grizly features—"I think it ran thus, that if Alberic du Coci should ever more plant foot on English turf, by holy Cuthbert and St. Oswyn, Earl Robert would so deal with him that, verily, there should be a death-mass sung for his soul in seven weeks' space. Be advised, Sir Alberic! Look to it—look to it well! It is ill sailing in the teeth of the storm; how thinkest *thou*, De Tunbridge?"

There was a momentary interchange of sig-

nificant glances between the Earl and the Baron, as the latter replied,—

“Truly, might I advise, the good knight will speedily put the deep seas between him and Earl Robert”

“Aye,” rejoined Montgomery, “or take sanctuary awhile perchance ———”

“—— Or pray King William for his especial protection”—added De Tunbridge.

“Or send such humble greeting northward,” (continued the Earl) “as may beget mercy in the breast of the great man. Oh, sir! it were a perilous world and a brief to offend Earl Robert! He is no suckling to cope withal I warrant you !”

The object of all this ill-omened mockery of admonition suddenly checked his courser—drew himself erect in the saddle, and, with clear expanded brow, and such a glance of his dark eye as betokened scorn, even to laughter, of the implied perils, exclaimed,—

“Look ye, my masters! Hugh, Earl of Shrewsbury, and thou, Sir Knight of the Falcon, I am come to this fair land when, belike, the harvest of plunder is well-nigh gathered in; but, by St. George! did a thousand De

Mowbrays, with the great arch-fiend at their head, seek to gainsay me, I would thrust in my sickle! Tut, noble sirs! ye have flown your hawks at the wrong quarry! In seven weeks space I will stand in fairer plight than ever, or ye shall have good leave to shoot me dead with wit-shafts! Meanwhile, on ride I to court; and, for Earl Robert, if he be yet minded to grasp my throat rather than my hand, *this* do I say, and frankly, I will meet him as a good knight and true, whensoever and wheresoever he listeth; for the love of his lady to joust three courses with spear — three strokes with brand, three with dagger, and three with battle-axe. What! hath he nurst a ·seven years' mood for a few wild words banded over the wine-cup, and which were well nigh being washed out in my heart's-blood at Gloucester?"

"Ye say well, Sir Knight," answered Montgomery—"yet are '*villain*' and '*traitor*' dark names to thrust in a proud man's teeth."

"Had I called him such twice and again," resumed Du Coci, "what less did he approve himself within brief space after, when he, and that good man of reverence, his kinsman

Geoffrey, the rough-handed Bishop, who loved the brown-bill better than the crosier, gave Bath and Berkeley Castle to fire and sword ? What call ye rebellion I trow ? and whom call ye traitor ? Marry, they had done as much for Ilchester, had not its Constable, the stout De Waleric, been of a right soldier's mettle.— And, well remembered, how fares it with that brave knight ? ”

“ I think,” answered De Tunbridge, “ he is seneschal of the fair castle built upon Tyne, at Monkchester, by Duke Robert—men now call it the New Castle.”

“ So,” replied Du Coci, “ then hath the hot Earl of Northumberland a fair neighbour—and I would blythely know what love and courtesy rest between them ; yet *more* blythely, what between Robert de Mowbray and *thee*, noble Montgomery, and other of the true hearts I may chance to encounter at Winchester ? ”—

This home question induced another exchange of intelligent looks between the Earl Marshal and his friend ; and it was not without hesitation that the former replied,—

“ We will discuss this when thou hast over-

lived the seven weeks' grace of De Mowbray's oath. But where," he added, "where be thy followers, Du Coci? what power hast thou at thy back in this evil day? ha!"—

"That also, lord Marshal, we will discuss when time serves; meanwhile, here is my squire of the body, who I think hath devoured all his fellows, man, horse, and armour; for by St. Francis! I know no better tale to tell of the villainous herd."

"A fair troop have they been!" said De Tunbridge scornfully, "the good knight hath no better terms for them than such as the Saxon boor flings to his swine."

"And yet," said Montgomery, looking fixedly at our friend Nicholas, "if this varlet's mazzard telleth a true tale, he were scarce fitted for a devourer of pork! Mass! he hath the proper visage of an unbelieving caitiff!"

"Well," said Du Coci, "Satan hath been unhorsed there I promise you, and Mother Church shall acknowledge her own, if the good Prior of St. Mary's be not lapp'd in lead. What ho! De l'Epée! make thine obeisance to the Lord High Marshal, and to this good

knight, whom I yet know not. And now, if you be indeed the Earl of **Chester**, who rides before us, away upon the spur, commend me to the noble Hugo as fairly as thou mayst with that glib tongue of thine ; and desire of his nobleness, when and where it lists him to receive certain greetings whereof I am the unworthy bearer from France and Normandy ! Away ! ”

CHAPTER IV.

“ Ere thou of thy mother camest,
 For thee was a mould shapen—
 For thee was a house built,—
 Unhigh and low.
 (When thou art in it)
 The heel-ways and side-ways,
 Unhigh and low !
 Full nigh thy breast
 Is the roof built ?
 Loathly is that earth-house
 And damp and dark,
 And cold and doorless,
 Grim is it to dwell in !
 Never shall friend ask thee
 How that house liketh thee,
 There shall worms dwell with thee,
 There art thou laid silent,
 And Death keepeth the key ! ”

The Exeter Manuscript.

HUGH LUPUS, or Hughe le Loupe, or Hugh d'Abinges, or Hugh d'Avranches, for by all these appellations was the nobleman distinguished to whom Nicholas de l'Epée now rode as envoy, stood, both by rank and possessions, in the foremost grade of Anglo-Nor-

man aristocracy. A near relative, as well as friend of the Conqueror, he had received from that liberal monarch the earldom of Chester, with such unwonted authority annexed as rendered the possessor little less than an independent prince. Hugh le Loupe, in fact, was the first noble after the Conquest in whom was vested the extraordinary powers of an Earl Palatine, being permitted, as we now state for the benefit of all the would-be-learned in such matters, to hold his territories “tam libere ad gladium sicut ipse Rex tenebat Angliam ad coronam.” Yet farther be it known, that the office of sword-bearer at the coronation was also held by the weapon with which Earl Hugo (we latinize for distinction) was invested with the above dignity.*

Looking with an evil eye upon his rugged neighbours of Cambria, Hugo speedily carried his banner with the wolf's head over the river Dee, which, at the extremity of Offa's dyke,

* We believe that this very identical weapon, inscribed “*Hugo Comes Cestraci*,” is still preserved in the British Museum; the curious or the sceptical must

“ Go seek it there and see;
Ours is a tale of the Red King,
And not a history”—of antiques.

formed the northern limits of the Welsh territory.

Norman valour and discipline soon added Flint to the Palatinate, and the Earl calling out of Normandy divers of his ancient friends, “kith and kin,” began to exert his royal prerogative by the formation of a parliament, or council of state. He created eight barons, who were to uphold his dignity by payment of homage, and attendance on his great court at Chester Castle; and in time of war with Wales, to find, for every knight’s fee, a horse with caparison and furniture, or *two* without those additions, and to defend their lands with their own bodies in corselet and habergeon. That these peers of a petty sovereignty were “pretty fellows in their day,” as the old comedy says of Hannibal, may be estimated from the fact that each was attended by four esquires, each esquire by one gentleman, and each gentleman by one valet; to say nothing of each Baron possessing a power of life and death in his own court.

Rank, such as we have described, and wealth, such as we attempt not to describe, operating upon the good and ill of a proud

mind, and an unequal disposition, had rendered Hugo-le-Looup, of all the nobles in England, perhaps, the most profuse and the most discontented; the most powerful and the most irresolute. As to his profusion, the Humes and Lingards of those days inform us that he carried with him “rather an army than a family,”—despised the sordid precautions of receipts and disbursements—lavished away whole estates, and (quoth one of the *clerkly*) “had greater fondness for huntsmen and falconers than for holy men or tillers of the soil.” It was a natural consequence of all this that certain ungracious periods occasionally arrived when

“——— Revelry and mirth
Suffred syncope and solemn pause.”

At least when the magnificent banquets of Chester castle were scarcely furnished forth with customary facility. The phantom which “cometh as an armed man,” haunted the Earl of Chester in his huge halls and galleries, along which he paced in his desperation, swearing by every saint, Norman, Saxon, and Welsh, fretting, intriguing, and, more than once, rebelling. Few men, however, were less fitted to play the part of a rebel. He

wanted, not the personal bravery, but the mental firmness, the concentration, and the self-possession, necessary to the political fisher of troubled waters. He drifted from a purpose on the current of his own passions, or was lightly warped from it by the address of more artful colleagues. Capricious, in short, and wayward, but irresolute; timid of circumstances though not of persons; a warm friend, but liable to umbrage upon trivial grounds; a bitter enemy, but readily conciliated by either the reality or the appearance of submission,—is it necessary to say more for the reader's appreciation of Hugo, Earl of Chester? We think not, and, before resuming our narration, shall merely state that he was pursuing his way to Winchester with his fair niece, Matilda de Aquila, a young but haughty and ambitious beauty, whose natural loftiness of pretension was increased by long exclusive residence in her kinsman's capital, as it might be termed, where indeed she was approached with such homage and adulation as men ordinarily pay to sovereigns.

The road pursued by all the personages hitherto introduced in our drama, partook of the usual variety of forest-tracts, now expand-

ing into wide and beautiful glades, of which the fresh turf presented a grateful footing to the horses, and now narrowing into leafy de-
files, which necessarily drew out the cavalcade into little more than *Indian file*. Such especially was the case at the moment when Nicholas de L'Epee joined the rear of Earl Hago's band. Their path fell suddenly into the hollow of a water-course, cumbered with stones, fragments of roots and trunks and branches, and fallen portions of sod and clay, the whole betokening the ravages of a torrent exhausted by its own violence. Upon this unfavourable ground, (hastily and weakly chosen by the Earl to avoid closer fellowship with the Marshal and De Tunbridge, who kept the open glade) two horsemen could not ride abreast; and it seemed as if some time had elapsed since other than foot travellers had attempted it, for, at little more than the height of a tall man, the branches of many young trees, meeting from either side, were tangled and interknitted so closely as almost to forbid further progress to an equestrian. Upon the right was a high and precipitous bank, every-where thickly clothed with a wilderness of ash, beech, thorn, holly, and copsewood, while the

left presented a lower but scarcely less impervious wall of verdure, the spaces between the huge old trunks of oak, and beech, and elm, being *wickered*, if we may so speak, with saplings, and dwarf-shoots, and underwood.

The riders were at length compelled to alight, and lead their coursers through a chance gap in this “close intertexture of innumerable boughs.” It gave egress to a gentle and unencumbered declivity of sward, at whose base again arose the massy children of the forest, and again wandered a calm clear stream.

The Lady Matilda had already made *her* escape from the broken water-course, and Lupus himself was about to follow, when, in despite of all obstacles, stock, stone, branch and root, up rode Nicholas de L'Epee, and with his own peculiar grace plunged at once into his embassy. Its reception on the part of the Earl was that of mixed surprise and displeasure.

“Du Coci!” he exclaimed, “Alberic du Coci? Saint Grimbald! methought *that* gallant was under the turf this many a day!”

And he looked upon those near him with a confession of perplexity in his glance as to the reception of this unexpected parvenu. One

from the rear of the party now whispered him from whose band the messenger had been seen to issue ; upon which, turning with double coldness to the unabashed envoy, he said—

“Commend me to thy lord, Sir Varlet, and bid him await our leisure and repose in Winchester. It boots not to name a chamber of audience, until it be seen whether our good Lord Marshal purvey the fairer lodging for Hugh Lupus or Alberic du Coci.* Belike thy master hath mustered his array beneath the banner of Montgomery, ha ! or hath the feather-brained De Tunbridge councilled him upon this wise venture of a second court-quest in England ?”

“My master, Sir Earl,” replied Nicholas, in a tone which smacked still stronger of his ordinary easy impudence, “cares not a shaft’s point for the best banner that flutters in English breeze ! That is,” (he added, qualifying a little), “he oweth no fealty, save to God and his own pennon. For the knights at whose bridle-rein I have left him ; and, also, touching what your nobleness has pleased to call ‘a wise venture’——”

* Allotment of quarter was one of the rights of the Earl Marshal.

"Stint in thy chatter, and begone!" exclaimed Hugo Lupus—"the knave hath the tongue of a jestour at St. Giles' fair, and the visage of an unbelieving Jew! dost thou not bear? why, what sees the fool in the coppice, that he stares into it as though green leaves were a marvel?"

"Look to thyself, Sir Earl!" suddenly shouted De L'Epee; "here be archers of King Satan!" and, drawing his weapon, he sprang into the thicket on the right, with the agility of a cat, struggling furiously to force a passage to whatever ground lay beyond. At the same instant an arrow was discharged from amidst the coppice, and but for an instantaneous turn of the head in the confusion of De L'Epee's outcry, that moment had been the last of Hugo, Earl of Chester; for the cloth-yard shaft, which glanced from the side of the well-tempered headpiece, had otherwise found entrance in front, and fully acomplished the purpose of the shooter.

There was a general shout of indignation, and every one toiled to break through the woody fence beyond or amidst which the assassin had taken aim. This, although no easy task, was accomplished by several, but

the Earl, whose corpulency was such that the Welsh called him HUGO VRAS (Hugo the fat), was fain to seek more legitimate access, and rode out by the woody postern before mentioned.

In a more open glade, not reached without toil and time, he was at last joined by several of his squires and retainers, who confidently declared the assassin one of a band (numbering, at least, six or eight), now plunging into the woodland recesses with a rapidity which soon baffled all their pursuers.

In the midst of this scene of confusion and disarray appeared also Du Coci and De Tunbridge, who, encountering some stragglers of the chace, had received from them, in the usual spirit of surprised and alarmed story-tellers, a wild assurance that Earl Hugo was either slain outright or mortally wounded. The chivalrous generosity of the age, that feeling which mellowed and attempered many of its fiercer traits, quelled, in the mind even of De Tunbridge, all the insolence of faction. They rode promptly to the Earl's side, exclaiming in almost the same breath and tone,—

“How fares it with thee, noble Hugo? What scathe hast thou?”

"Not a scratch, I," replied Lupus. "But there is gear at hand, I fear me, worse to be amended! follow, noble sirs!"—and at his beck they hurried into a thicket, amidst whose obscurity the figure of Nicholas de L'Epee, sword in hand, was just vanishing. As they gained the side of that doughty squire a scene presented itself which strongly indicated that the attack on Lupus was but the supplementary act of a tragedy already too fatally performed.

Upon the ground, silent, motionless, and literally wallowing in gore, lay three horsemen, all transfixed with arrows in brow or bosom, and crushed amidst the plunging hoofs, or under the panting bulk, of their expiring horses, each of which had shared the brief and bitter fate of its rider. This fearful consummation of private or political enmity was the more revolting in its aspect, as nothing indicated fair hostility and defence—all spoke of assassin-like surprise and slaughter. The hands of the dead or dying victims were filled with the dust and clay which had met their last convulsive gripe, and not with the good steel which might have quelled or repulsed an honourable foe. They had perished in the

security and relaxation of peaceful travel ! Two, by their inferiority of equipment, seemed military retainers of the humbler class, but the third, whose manly and well-accoutréed form confirmed the suggestion of the knightly helm and hauberk, was obviously of another grade. He lay beneath the flank of his dead charger, his hands flung abroad, his face buried in grass and weeds ; but three mortal shafts in the head and breast told that Death had been momentary in his triumph, and that the spirit had passed before the body was conscious of a second pang.

" Now, by saints and angels !" exclaimed De Tunbridge, " here is an ugly slaughter ! St. Mary ! I see not a single blade drawn !"

" Raise the bodies," said Earl Hugo ; " it may be there is yet one breathing."

" Marry," said Du Coci, " I think there is yet living blood in this gallant—what ! have ye here a priest within beck or holla ? the pestilent *book-a-bosoms* are ever far to seek when there is sudden shriving-work to be done !"

" Nay," said Nicholas de L'Epee, " it boets not, ye may put them all to bed with a pick-

axe, they will never prance over other men's vineyards again, I warrant them!"'

"Look to him in the goodly hauberk!" cried another; "I wot he has been a stout knight and a true by his fair harness! what hope, Sir Ilbert? had we here a leech, it may be——"

"To the foul fiend with leechcraft!" said De Tunbridge; "he is death's prisoner, rescue or no rescue! help me to drag the body from beneath the steed—by our Lady a goodly one! softly my masters—lay him, (fie, what a red puddle of gore is here!) lay him with his face towards heaven;" then suddenly springing to his feet, he exclaimed, in thrilling tones, "Now as I live and breathe it is DE MOWBRAY of Northumberland!"

"Now our blessed Lady forbid;" cried Du Coci, generously; "he was as brave a knight as ever donned harness! that will I say for him, were his hatred to me and mine as deep and deaf as the wild ocean! Say not it is he, let me yet hope to look upon him alive, although our next meeting be more deadly than the last!"

Not a word broke from the lips of Earl Hugo, until stooping over the dead man, and

looking fixedly upon his pallid visage, he exclaimed in the tone of one infinitely relieved, "Rejoice who will—sorrow who may—this is none of De Mowbray. His hour hath yet to be. Yet, by my soul, this rider of evil chance and he of Northumberland have been marvellously alike in form and favour—aye, and the very helm and mail are of the fashion of De Mowbray's."

"I said it was a goodly hauberk," cried a former speaker, "but here is not the broad brow, nor the curled lip, nor the coal-black locks of Earl de Mowbray."

"Well," returned Lupus, "dark or fair, he lies a bloody corpse at the foot of one who will strive fairly to avenge him, be he who he may. I warrant him a Norman, or the accursed Saxon dogs had not dealt upon him thus murderously!"

"Is there no hope for the brave De Walleric!" said a strangely subdued voice which seemed to issue from a hollow of the coppice, and struck all around into silence; "then cut me these detested bands," it continued, "that I may look upon the clay which even but now was as bold and true a knight as ever wielded a lance!"

Every one looked hastily round in the sudden surprise, but nothing was distinguishable.

"Who, in the name of Satan, art thou?" said Du Coci, "and where?"

"I am manacled to the earth," replied the voice.

"And by earth and heaven!" rejoined Sir Alberic, "there will I pin thee with my lance, if thou or thine have but stretched forth a finger to this work of butchery! Speak yet again; what and where art thou?"

"Is *this* thy nook of durance, thou invisible one?" said Nicholas, leaping into the hollow, and adding presently, "aye, liere is a living bundle of legs and arms, but of little service, I trow, with such anklets and bracelets—he is *tethered* foot and hand to the oak-roots!"

"Cut him free, Sir Squire, and let us look upon him."

De L'Epee obeyed, and a human being, tied strongly down with fragments of a knight's baldric to the roots of an oak, amidst the thick underwood, was relieved from his strange thraldom. He presented to the surprised spectators the form and features of a youth, probably not more than nineteen, but with the expanded form, the erect gait, the

free carriage, and the determined countenance of one whose claim to manhood few would have thought it prudent to gainsay. The simple dress of a squire sat upon well-knit limbs of admirable proportion ; locks of dark brown clustered thickly beneath the bacinet rim—his face was pale, but not as if habitually, or, with a lighter emotion than that of sorrow. His forehead was high and intellectual ; his gaze as quick and piercing as ever flashed from the eye of the ger-falcon, and over the whole aspect was that ‘ fervid spirit’ of expression—that development of Shakspeare’s -

“ Co-mingling blood and judgment,”
of the gentle and the firm—the daring and the loving—the generous and the proud, which man looks upon with delight, and woman with adoration.

He threw himself upon the turf beside the bleeding De Waleric, (for so he had just named the murdered knight,) pressed the cold hand and the clammy brow, and, after a moment’s gaze upon the dead, sprang again to his feet, exclaiming—

“ Are they that have thus perished Norman curs or Saxon slaves, that ye look upon them thus, and not a foot in the stirrup for pursuit

and vengeance ? the victims yet warm, and the murderers scarce beyond a shaft-flight."

"Measure thy speech," said the Earl, "it will the better befit this presence. For pursuit of the dogs who have wrought this black deed, care not thou, until we have learnt thine own part therein. I am Hugo of Chester!"

But not for this annunciation did the assurance of the youth quail, or his eye lose one spark of its fire.

"Had the Lord of Chester," he said, "been thus found by De Waleric, that true and loyal heart would have spurred his best charger until it foundered in the chace, ere one of the accursed wolves had sped to his den scathless!"

"Why, who in the devil's name art *thou*?" said De Tunbridge.

"It skills not prating of one obscure and nameless as myself," he replied, while both tone and glance seemed at once to disclaim and belie the assertion. "But here," he continued, "here with the arrow of an assassin in his bosom, is De Waleric of the New Castle. He was journeying from his far Northern towers to Winchester, with but two bare retainers. We met, as the sun threw his first glance

along the forest-paths, and journeyed together rein to rein, until, in this accursed spot, a volley of deadly shafts (be the hands withered which shot them) struck lifeless to the dust both knight and vassals—rider and horse! Word, groan, nor cry did they utter—they fell as though the bolts of heaven had flashed through brain and bosom!"

"And thou!" interrupted Du Coci, "rapped there not one shaft upon thy mail? Hadst thou not steel by thy side, and the blood and bone of a man to gripe it withal?"

"My own good steed," resumed the stranger, "fell under me at the moment, and expired with one wild agony. Ere I could drag my foot from the stirrup, or lay hand on hilt, the grasp of three ruffians was upon me, and in an instant more they bound me hand and foot, and were gone like spirits of evil!"

"A proper marvel!" exclaimed De Tunbridge, with something of incredulous scorn. "The Saxon villains shoot me *three* of the fair company as dead as ever was buck; and, by our Lady, they spare me the *fourth*, and lay him gingerly upon the turf to live and learn. What! didst thou never hear, good youth, that dead men tell no tales?"

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"Impugn not his faith," said Du Coci, "there is truth upon his broad brow. How many, I pray you, of this fair archer-troop?"

"I cannot vouch for number," replied the youth. "Three pinioned me to the earth, and, as I think, there were others busied amongst the fallen; making sure, perchance, of the work of slaughter."

"'Tis very like," said the Earl, "but, by St. Antony, thy escape is right marvellous. *I* also" (crossing himself) "have been bucklered by especial grace! Marry, thou hadst lain groaning here many a long hour, it may be, had not one of these clerks of St. Nicholas essayed his bow-craft upon *me* also. But enough. We will have reverent care of these dead riders; and, for their murderers, if 'the hundred' bring them not to the gallows within brief space, right heavily mulcted shall it be, I promise the greasy churls! truly, they will scarce prove 'THE ENGLISHRY'* of the knight,

* When a Norman was killed, the men of "the Hundred" had to bring up the murderer within eight days, or pay a fine of 47 marks of silver. The Saxons endeavoured to elude this by mutilating the bodies of their victims, but the expedient was nullified by a counter-decree, that every man found dead should be considered as Norman, unless the "Hundred" could judicially prove him of Saxon birth, by oath of two

be his *retainers* of what strain they may. For thee, Sir Springald, that hast come out of the wolf's jaws so wondrously, belike King William will himself question thee of the death of his good liegeman, De Waleric, who held the Towers of Monkchester-on-Tyne from the royal hand."

"And that the king may know whom to challenge in the matter," said De Tunbridge, "say, stripling, what and who art thou?"

"I am Raymond, surnamed *Cœur d'Acier*," replied the youth, "squire to the good knight and Earl, De Mowbray of Northumberland."

It seemed as if the very name of this potent nobleman could not be pronounced without somewhat of a stultifying effect upon the hearers. For some moments there was profound silence. Du Coci's eye lit up with a strange sparkle. Sir Ilbert's cheek and brow actually flushed with the surprise, and Nicholas de L'Epee pulled a grimace of significance, elevating his eyebrows, and laying a finger upon his puckered mouth, as if to indicate unutterable things most sapiently.

Earl Hugo alone retained the settled aspect men and two women, near akin to the deceased, by father and mother's side. This was called "*proving the Englishry*."

which evinced that surprise was not for him—that he had recognised the squire of the northern Earl before his avowal.

“Look to thyself,” said De Tunbridge, apart to Sir Alberic, “where the imps be, the Master-Demon is not far off!”

“Far or near,” replied he of the broken lance, “little reck I of that. When, even now, Robert de Mowbray was held to be the dead lion, thou sawest me not pluck him by the beard, nor am I now to start like a scared steed from the print of his foot. Whisper those of your faction, fair sir, *I stand or fall alone!*”

“Perish then for a self-willed dolt!” said the other, and immediately drew off.

Lupus then gave brief orders for the conveyance of the dead to Winchester, and, as these were obeyed, said hastily and apart to *Cœur d'Acier*—

“What of thy lord, that thou art here alone? Comes he not southward this good Pentecost?”

“My lord's purpose is in his own breast,” was the reply. “I left him in his castle of Tynemouth.”

“What!” rejoined the Earl, “know ye not

that King William looked with an evil eye upon his absence from the Gloucester court at Easter?"

"Little knows King William of the wilds of Northumberland," said Raymond. "Earl Mowbray hath Scot and Saxon both to quell upon the borders."

"Well," responded Hugo Lupus, "of the King's matters, let the King question, as, by St. Grimbald, I think he will, in no gentle terms. Whisper so much from me in thy Lord's ear, good Raymond. But, methinks, when the couriers of De Mowbray sped southward in time past, it was their master's wont to send fair greeting to Hugo of Chester. Art thou the bearer of none such?"

"Of none!" said the northern squire, briefly and firmly. "And I will crave of the noble Hugo of Chester, to pardon the free speech which adds, that never can De Mowbray send greetings to the cold friend, whom he may scarce distinguish from the secret foe!"

"Over hasty and suspicious is thy lord!" replied the Earl, with some embarrassment, for he was fully conscious of having protracted most tediously a certain delicate treaty of alliance between himself and the Northumbrian

potentate, from mere timidity as to the terms upon which the latter stood with the sovereign ; De Mowbray having, either from pride of heart, or the cause assigned by his squire, neglected to attend the court at Gloucester, to pay fealty and homage as crown-feudatory ; a slight which it was scarcely probable the fiery temper of the King would again tamely submit to.

"But," continued Hugo-le-Loup, "tarry—it may be that ——" (a pause.) "Well,—follow thou to the mid-day repast—we will purvey thee a fresh steed—for thine own will never champ bit again. Ho!" he exclaimed, in other tones, as Nicholas de L'Epee again caught his eye,—“good friend with the Jewish visage! we owe thee a guerdon, and will remember thee in Winchester right fairly—there let thy master seek me. Why art not gone? Ha! Seest thou another clerk of St. Nicholas in the coppice?"

"No!" answered the worthy, "but I see Sir Alberic du Coci, who is my very good lord, if it so please you, and will himself take his own answer belike."

"Thou art a marvellous impudent knave," said the Earl,—“fall back!" Then, coldly,

as Sir Alberic drew near, “ I cry you mercy, Sir Knight, I took ye for some fair kinsman of the Marshal, and have forgotten thy visage this many a day.”

“ By St. Mary, noble Hugo ! ” said Du Coci, “ I care not how little be remembered either of my former visage or former fortunes. Time, that hath roughened the one, may yet smooth the other, and I am content to begin the world anew—to forgive old friends, and forget old feuds. Evil chance, these seven years gone, hath whipped the malapert boy out of me, and hither come I, with stirrup and lance for my kith and kin, to build up a fair fame and fortune amongst the stout gallants of England ! ”

“ Beware,” said Luples, “ that ye make not shipwreck of both—a right stormy ocean hast thou, I promise thee, for thy bark of adventure, in this fierce realm.”

“ True heart and hand against the worst of its wind and wave ! ” exclaimed the gallant.

“ By heaven, Sir Mariner, I believe thou art a fool ! to horse ! to horse ! I say not that I hold thee yet for friend or foe—but follow thou to where the goblet dances—wine is of fairer red than blood—and by St. Grimbald,

time is it that the Lady Maud had warrant from her own eyes how the world wags with us in these days of evil archery. Ere now, belike, she hath heard that the Saxon villains have drugged us one and all with a like posset, knight and knave—horse and man. Away!"

And thus saying, he rode off, followed both by the living and the dead.

CHAP. V.

"From whence com'st thou, Oh harper sweet?
From whence com'st thou, tell me?
From border of the daring Scot
Or from the North Country?"

Old Ballad.

"GUESS ye what hath chanced i'the forest even now!" said De Tunbridge, as he checked his returning courser by the side of Montgomery.

"Good hap or bad?" enquired the Marshal, "that thou touchest upon it with such fiery eyes?"

"By St. Peter, I know not which! but there is blood shed, and life lost, I can tell ye. De Waleric of the New Castle on Tyne bank lies within shaft-flight from hence, bored to the very brain and lungs with cloth-yard shafts —dead as St. Dunstan, rider and horse!"

"Alone?"

"Aye, save two varlets, and they will never thrust finger in other men's pasties

again—they are all served with the like deadly sauce."

"Be they stark and stiff?" enquired the Earl of Shrewsbury, with much the indifferent tone of one who speaks of a litter of blind puppies; "hath the business been long done?"

"Scarce half an hour, as I should think; the bodies were yet warm, and bleeding, by'r Lady, most pig-like—faugh! I have made a beastly hawking glove!"

"And by whom have they been dealt upon, I pray you?" continued Montgomery.

"By my faith," answered the knight, "it may behove us to look well to that! a pestilient knot of fiery-footed villains (Saxons, an' it like you,) are plying me their deadly archery from behind bush and brake; no man is safe that shows two inches of flesh and fell between mail and plate. Marry, they have gone nigh to tickle Hugo Lupus of Chester with such another feather. I promise ye the fat gourmand hath had a narrow escape!"

"Aye?" said the Earl with a hoarse laugh, "why then, who knows where a blessing may fall? belike some of us, for as pert and jolly as we ride here, may be marked down like bucks in prime, ere we reach Winchester.

Have a quick eye, for the nonce, my masters !
lest a forked shaft or two from the greenwood
mar your travelling pace !”

“By Mary-mother!” exclaimed De Tunbridge, “it is fair jesting and safe, in such goodly guise as ye are sweating under, Sir Earl! ye and your black mountain of a charger; but, belike, it would prove no grinning matter for others of lighter riding-gear. I have no plastron under this single hauberk.”

“No! thou art ever devising some foolish toy to prank that fair body of thine in, but hast never the wisdom to don such stout and availing harness as may keep out lance, dagger, and shaft. I’faith, there will come a chance back-thrust, or random shot of crossbow, some black day o’ the week, that will physic thee of thy love of gaud and glitter! Tush, man! hew me those idle ram’s horn peaks from thy boots, and buckle a good hauberk of double mail over these silken nothings and velvet-vanities! afore God, the Saxon caitiffs may rain their arrows upon *my* doublet as tho’ they shot at a blacksmith’s anvil !”

“I have as goodly armour for my need as ever a man in Britain,” replied De Tunbridge.

“What doth it in thy castle chambers then,”

rejoined the Earl, “when it should serve its lord in field and forest?”

“What skills it to ride evermore in the peaceful greenwood under such cumbrous panoply as befits only the battle-field, or the barriers of a beleaguered city?”

“And what call ye *peaceful?*” retorted the dark-browed Montgomery, who, indeed, mounted, armed, attended, and visaged (if we may so speak,) as he was, looked the very antipodes of the pacific. “This is a goodly realm to prate of *peace* in, where every man’s *Fusberta-joyosa** is hacking at his neighbour’s throat! and the Saxon boars whetting *their* poisonous tusks against every tree i’ the forest, to rip me the bowels of their masters! here be the Welsh kernes, as Du Coci calls them, driving the marchers and their chivalry from tower and town in the West; and the fiery Scot holding De Mowbray at spear’s point in the North. *Peace* said ye, forsooth? hark, in thine ear thou man of *peace*.”

And they rode somewhat in advance, so as to be out of ear-shot of their followers.

“Now,” he continued, but in another tone,

* Name of Charlemagne’s sword in old romances.

"what of Hugo the Fat? said'st thou he is slain?"

"No; the devil tempered his head-piece, and the shaft glanced but, and away!"

"Well—of De Waleric? touching *his* death—let us take timely heed. See'st thou not that much evil or much good may chance from it?"

"As how?"

"Thus," replied the Marshal; "who, think ye, will seek to name a new seneschal for the towers of Monkchester-on-Tyne, but Robert de Mowbray, thereby, doubtless, to make himself lord of the whole North? and who but thou and I, Ilbert de Tunbridge, can fairly strive to gainsay him, and, it may be, to plant in that strong hold some loving friend who may prove a black neighbour to Earl Robert when time serves?"

"Oh, cry you mercy!" said the Knight, "I do perceive—marry, it were timely wisdom, then, to make early suit to the king, had we but once a fitting man chosen."

"Content ye, good Sir Ilbert, content ye, we have far to choose for that; how think you of De Aldery? or De Lacy? or — by Peter's keys! although it be a pity of De

Waleric, who was a brave knight, yet is this vacancy of Tyne Castle a very god-send in our way!"

"But softly—softly," said De Tunbridge, "what thinkest thou, Lord Marshal, of this; a minion of De Mowbray's—his squire of the body—the same, doubtless, who saved his lord from a borderer's lance at the battle of Alnwick—a fiery springald as ever touched steel—was stretched amidst the coppice beside the dead riders. How think ye of that?"

"Think!" reiterated Montgomery with surprise, "twice and again will I think of it ere ——— De Mowbray's squire? why, there was deadly hatred betwixt his lord and De Waleric! How rode the stripling? What followers had he? and how armed?"

"Nay," replied Sir Ilbert, "the youth was alone, saving the dead men—fast pinioned to the earth, poor imp! and saith that they who so manacled him were the same that dealt (there and then) upon De Waleric and his varlets."

"*He saith!*" rejoined the Marshal, with a sneer, "aye, marry, *he saith* —! What! the Saxon boar, with his fleshed tusk, spare to do murder upon man, maid, or babe? Tut! seek

other answer to this riddle, De Tunbridge; for much do I doubt that never Saxon hath put hand to the bloody gear. Doubtless there be who would better love to hear De Waleric sleeps eternally than ever a Saxon in all England!"

"It were ill proving this matter upon De Mowbray," said the Knight, after a pause.

"But right easy to throw the *suspicion* upon his dark name, Sir Ilbert," replied Montgomery.

"I know not that," said the other. "Were he ten times my foe, I would say and swear that I hold him no lurking assassin."

"Say and swear as thou wilt before Hugh de Montgomery, but hold thy peace in the presence of King William, who, if I err not, will presently open a glad ear to the worst that tongue and lip can utter of De Mowbray. No time is this for mincing courtesy, and playing generous jack-fool. If Earl de Mowbray be suspected, why, so—put thou no spoke i' the wheel. Who saw this northern knave cut from the bonds thou talkest of?"

"Marry," answered De Tunbridge, "there were divers plunging amidst the fern and coppice-wood—but, I think it was Du Coci's

varlet—or one of the band of Hugo Lupus
—”

“ Why look ye there now ! ” said the Marshal ; “ thou sawst nothing of his *bonds*—thou didst but *hear* of such ; and, for Hugo Lupus and his faction, who knows not that they will say all in all as saith De Mowbray and his minion ? *Their* witness were as Beelzebub for Satan. Touching this hair-brained gallant, Du Coci, we have scarce done well to whistle him down the wind thus suddenly ; he must be lured to perch and hood ; aye, and to fly but at what quarry we list. He is a hawk of the very breed and feather to find grace in the king’s eye ; the rather, it may be, that, in times past, he was the fixed foe of De Mowbray. Tush—tush—we will work, Sir Ilbert, we will work ; and if Earl Robert come not the speedier southward, and tell not the fairer tale when he *be* come, we will hoist the proud rider out of his saddle, or so scare him that he will hardly prance in our paths thenceforward.”

“ Meanwhile,” said De Tunbridge, “ this varlet of his—this Raymond of the heart of steel, and brow of brass.”

“ Oh, Heavenly Virgin ! ” cried Montgomery, “ well bethought—Sleek Hugo Lupus will break

cage for the wild-bird, and let him fly.—But, look!" he added, as a cavalier approached at a hand-gallop, "what kestril have we here upon the wing?"

"St. Mary!" cried De Tunbridge, "it is De Aldery, the kinsman of our murdered man—"

"Then bear a brain, Sir Ilbert! this is a quick call to witness."

Their conjecture however was false. The object of it (yet ignorant of the fate of his relative) came upon another and a lighter mission; to introduce which befittingly, we must for awhile postpone its fulfilment, and allow the course of our narrative not only to digress, but retrograde, under a promise of heedful return to the very point we are quitting.

For the present then, we go back to a period somewhere about the middle of our last chapter, when the Lady Matilda, with certain knights, waiting damsels, and other retainers, passed from the narrow stream-bed to the open woodland. It is time also, to look more steadily upon this imperious beauty.

Richerius de Aquila, a powerful Norman noble, won with lance and sword at a tournament, the lovely Judith, a sister of Hugo Lu-

pus. Of this marriage Matilda was the offspring; and well did the beauty of her person, and the fiery qualities of her mind, bespeak and become the sole pledge of an union so chivalrously formed. Ardent, impetuous, and uncontrollable, the little minion of parental fondness asserted from very childhood the predominance of her own wayward will. Moody under restraint, fierce with denial, she developed this rebellious tendency the more fully as her gentle Mother ever contented herself with fighting half the battle; while the knightly Father exulted in the evil victory of the child, fondly regarding her indomitable spirit as the “flash and outbreak” of a noble nature, and only regretting that the fair spoiled one was not in very reality *masculine*, fitted as well in body as in mind for achievements worthy of her race. The death of both parents effected little change either in the apparent destinies or moral discipline of Matilda, who, by a transfer to the guardianship of her uncle Hugo, lost nothing of territorial expectation, and, perhaps, as little of her constitutional stubbornness. The Earl, indeed, when his commands were resolutely withstood, broke into occasional fits of wrath, but as these were of

brief endurance, and (partly from natural indolence of temper, partly from a tender sense of her orphan state) always followed by proportionate indulgence and caress, the lively Damoiselle maintained her ascendancy, and sprang to womanhood with unbroken waywardness.

It was remarked, however, by those under her immediate influence, that the Lady Matilda, who suffered none to gainsay her lightest humour, could, at times, exercise a mastery over her own stubbornness, and attain, by voluntary sacrifice of *one* purpose, the more perfect and secure possession of *another*. As childhood expired, and a maturer period advanced, she exchanged the fiery starts of passion for a cool sarcastic levity and bitterness, which, while indulging no less her natural pride and doggedness of resolve, left her infinitely more of self-possession, and accorded, too, with something of a talent for intrigue and a feeling of ambition which began strongly to develop themselves.

The personal attractions of Matilda, though of a peculiar order, and far from calculated to awaken equal admiration in every bosom, were yet such as, in the stormy spirits of that fierce

age, might well awaken the very enthusiasm of passion. In countenance she resembled her noble father, as strongly as the lineaments of female beauty *can* resemble those of harsher man.

“ Her eyes,
Her hair, her features, all, to the very tone
Even of her voice, they said were like to his,
But soften’d all and tempered into beauty.”

Her complexion was the reverse of *fair*, but of the most perfect clearness and softness. Her forehead was majestically high, and shadowed by a profusion of raven black tresses. Her eyes were of the same sable hue, and flashed upon the beholders a repelling consciousness of the haughty spirit which kindled and shot forth those intellectual lightnings. The mouth and nose were alike exquisitely moulded, but still, as regarded expression, full of the burning development of *will*. The lip and nostril bespoke that “beautiful disdain, and might, and majesty,” which has been ascribed to the masterpiece of ancient sculpture. She was tall in stature, and her whole form, as finely modelled as her features, possessed, too, that graceful freedom—that flexible vigour and elasticity which only youth and

health, with their bounding animal spirits, and the stimulus of mountain air and exercise, can give. Nor was the possessor of all this ignorant of the power which even the most perfect natural beauty derives from the embellishment of art ; but in the very richness of her attire there was a chaste and admirable simplicity.

Of noble birth, young, beautiful, enthusiastic, full of the life of life, not wanting in generous sentiment, and last, if not least, the heiress of immense possessions, it would have been strange indeed if many an impassioned eye did not burn upon Matilda de Aquila. Such a conquest, however, was not to be lightly achieved. Besides the right of guardianship exercised by the Earl of Chester, a stronger barrier arose in the claims of William the Red, who, as lord paramount of feudal England, enjoyed the wardship of every heiress until the expiration of her minority. It may be necessary to remind some readers that this was not merely a *nominal* right, easily avoided, or compounded for, but virtually an important branch of the regal prerogative and revenue ; or, rather, one of the most profitable mediums of extortion which the rapacity of the

Anglo-Norman monarchs devised. A grant of wardship was often the efficient means of enriching a minister or a favourite. *How* efficient, sometimes, may be conceived from the recorded facts of ten thousand merks being paid for the wardship of a young nobleman ; and of a descendant of one of the personages in this narrative expending double that sum for permission to marry Isabel, Countess of Gloucester, and possess her lands and knights' fees. This purchase at once of a wife and property was equal to between three and four hundred thousand pounds of our present money.

Yet further, the royal “ Paravail ” was authorised to offer to his fair feudatory any husband of her own rank, whom it was his princely pleasure to oblige ; and if the lady preferred choosing for herself, as was indeed somewhat natural, she paid the trifling penalty of forfeiting all her lands and possessions.

It is to be supposed, therefore, that such a minor as Matilda was an object of interest to more parties than one :—first, the near and noble relative who immediately protected her ; then the Sovereign, alike grasping and prodigal, who might speculate upon something handsome accruing to his exchequer ; and,

lastly, the chivalry of the Marches, who would, doubtless, shiver many a spear to win a favouring glance from such a prize.

It was not yet known that the lady had manifested any exclusive predilection for a favoured one amongst her knightly admirers; and, touching her guardian, Lups, we may observe that his assumption of that title, however seemingly reasonable, wanted the royal sanction, which could alone stamp it as legitimate. No grant of *wardship* had formally vested in his person the rights he exercised; and there was the consequent risk that, at any period, Matilda might be called upon to accept a husband of the Sovereign's choice, with only the bitter alternative of becoming “*feudless and landless*” by refusal. This evil chance, however, Hugo Lups never seriously anticipated. It was his own, and, perhaps, the general supposition, that the king, grasping as he was, would yet respect the *implied or supposed* immunities of a Principality erected by his father to be conferred on a relative; and either tacitly forego his royal claim, or make a gracious tender (in some happy mood) of a full right of wardship to the kinsman who had hitherto done homage for the lady's possessions,

and punctually discharged the feudal duties annexed to them. On the other hand it was to be remembered, that this very homage implied an admission of the regal claim, and that whatever privileges the Earl might challenge, as to the tenants of *the Palatinate*, the matter of his fair kinswoman stood upon other grounds, her lands and castles, in fact, not being situate in that principality, but in other and various parts of England. As to the *legality* of the question, therefore, no doubt could exist; but so uncertain was then all legal *operation* that something still was left to conjecture; and much, no doubt, was to be referred to the character of the monarch, who, though capable of extreme generosity, was also capable of the very reverse; prodigal munificence being in William Rufus the parent of merciless rapacity.

We have thought it necessary to premise this feudal peculiarity in the situation of Matilda, but now gladly return to our narrative.

When the fair kinswoman of Hugo Lupus quitted the narrow glade in which his life was attempted immediately after, she rode a beautiful Andalusian jennet, procured for her at an immense price, and magnificently *trapped*; silver of the purest, and even gold and jewel-

lery, being lavished both upon saddle and housings; while the silk of the latter was stiffened gorgeously with embroidered work. Four attendants of her own sex accompanied her, two behind, and two who occupied more favoured situations on either hand. These, well mounted and splendidly attired, seemed admitted to occasional converse, and joined at that moment with becoming earnestness in a discourse upon the “*sayre pastyme*” of hawking, sustained between Matilda and Nigel, Baron of Halton, her good uncle’s thick-witted chancellor. The mute suggestor of the theme, a merlin of uncommon beauty, enjoyed a no less honoured perch than the wrist of his lady, to which he was slightly secured by a silken *creace* or thread. It seemed as if the petted plumed one exulted in his station, and in the caresses he received; for, at intervals, he stretched his smooth neck, shook his glossy pinions, and glanced his brilliant eye, with an air of consciousness which it was difficult not to interpret as the pride of a favourite.

“Ye have done well, noble lady,” said Nigel, “to have the fair bird hither, for I can tell you there is goodly hawking upon the Itchin; marry, I have seen when king

and court were all out with falcon on fist, and there hath gone up such a gallant heron as would spit fairly through from breast to back the rarest hawk that ever *winded* or *swooped!*"

Matilda gave her lip to the feathered favourite, much as a modern fair one might do to a pet paroquet, and then answered—

"I will mate him with the best in King William's mews for *flying at the brook*; he hath done right well by Chester-streams, but, if he soar not the fairer flight when a king's eye watches it, he shall be neck-wrung with his own jesses for a sorry kestril!"

"God's cranes and his herons, lady!" exclaimed the inapprehensive and literal baron. "Ye jest sure! a good hawk, when he hath gotten the vantage-pitch, will strike me the quarry as fairly in the eyes of Tom-fool as a crowned king."

"I remember me," said Morna, one of the waiting damsels, with great simplicity, "a merry tale (and he was a goodly-visaged palmer that told it,) of a court-hawking at Paris, no further gone than Easter-tide, when the heron that lanced two of King Philip's best falcons was trussed at length by an especially rare merlin; men said it was as goodly-

fair as its mistress, Constance de Mowbray, the daughter of the great northern earl."

A sparkle of Matilda's keen eye belied the indifference of tone in which she said,—

"Who amongst ye hath seen that paragon? Methought she was scarce yet of years to ride with hawk on hand."

None present had actually seen the nymph, but all agreed in the common rumour of her excessive beauty; and maid Morna, who had first blundered upon the topic, now went on,—

"Nay, I warrant me, lady, I asked more questions than one touching that proud earl's daughter, and, hawk or no hawk, Constance de Mowbray is no unfledged eyass herself. Fair jousting was there, and harping, and banqueting, and I know not what, in honour of her charms, among the French gallants; marry, to look upon Earl Robert, for as black and bold as he be, one would scarce deem him the sire of such a womanly minion."

"Womanly!" repeated Matilda, and paused for some time before adding—

"And what doth this fair paragon in France, I marvel? hath sorry England neither eye, heart, lance, nor harp? must we poor Island-dames, who tarry at home like Lob-lie-by-the-

fire, go sue for mates amidst the Welsh wolves, or the Saxon swine-feeders?"

As she spoke thus, her eye encountered that of William de Aldery, a young man of noble but melancholy aspect, who rode near; he replied in tones which accorded with the stamp of sadness upon his brow—

"It were harsh to believe that the Lady Matilda indeed and truly doubts whether our Island chivalry boast not hearts as loyal, as tender, and as true, as the best and bravest of France or Normandy."

"*Boast!*!" responded Matilda, "I doubt not that; they will say and swear it. They suffer not their good name to rust for lack of a little vain-glorious burnishing with their own knightly lips."

"Of myself," replied De Aldery, "I speak not; to me even the praise of others were little worth. But for our order at large—the chivalry of England—well may I challenge such praise as the wide world in after years shall pour upon it abundantly; the brave in battle—the resigned in death—the true in love."

"They are especial good talkers, I grant ye," rejoined the caustic lady; "but I would fain pick from their fair ranks one that would

live, for one huge month, solely for one sole maiden;—that would I fain see, were it but for the miracle's sake."

"Many there are, lady," replied the youth, "who, in all pure love, and stainless honour, would live and die for one sole maiden."

"Die!" she replied, "aye, of the *Drife*,* or, it may be, of deep drinking, but not of love. When that prodigy comes, I look also to see palfreys with six legs!"

"Our Lady help us with those that have but four!" ejaculated maid Morna, her patience fairly exhausted by the refractory spirit of her steed, who, for some time had continued, at very brief intervals, to prance, and start, and capriole, to the infinite annoyance of his buxom rider. Determined, however, to assert her supremacy, the damsel essayed a smart application of the riding-rod, to which the only response was a redoubled energy of kick and caper; until, at length, in the fury of the contest, the luckless pinner of head-gear bestowed such a switch upon the Lady Matilda's falcon, instead of the rebellious courser, that the affrighted bird broke, screaming, from the hand of his mistress, and fled incontinently over a

* An epidemic so called in the middle ages.

thicket of alders, skirting the path upon the right. Well may such an incident throw into immediate shadow all the friskings and curvetting of dame Morna's unlucky horse, not to mention the jeopardy of said dame herself. Far be it, indeed, from us to elevate such slight matters into comparison with the loss of a feathered *protegè*, whose place could not be supplied by the value of a thousand tiring women!

In an instant all was confusion, bustle, and assiduity, for the recovery of the fugitive. The gallants sprang from their saddles, and plunged into the thicket, each desirous to be the fortunate restorer of a waif so precious. But it was not the good hap of knight, squire, or page, to perform this meritorious service. A stranger, whose habiliments argued him nor one nor other of those grades, emerged suddenly from the woody screen with the scared merlin in his hold, and restored it, not ungracefully, to its envied perch.

It required but a single glance to show that the individual so auspiciously introduced to Matilda, was a professor of "*the gai science*," in other words, a minstrel; one of those erratic children of song, whom the romance and en-

thusiasm of the age elevated to the companion-
ship, and to the board of princes. He was
tall, erect, agile, well proportioned, and seemed
to be in the very prime of life. His complexion,
naturally fair, bore tokens of exposure to
the "skiey influences," and perhaps to the
beams of a warmer sun than ordinarily looks
through the misty heavens of Britain. His
features were more than handsome, they had
an expression of frank and active good hu-
mour, to which a high, broad forehead, a
mouth of extreme beauty, and quick imagina-
tive blue eyes, added feeling and dignity.
He wore the professional garb, every article
exclusively of dark green; tunic, chausses,
vest, cloak, and bonnet. A silver *wrest*, or
instrument for tuning his harp, hung before
him upon a chain of the same metal, but THE
HARP itself was not yet visible.

"Fairest bird to fairest perch!" said the
complimentary Bard, as he performed the of-
fice of restoration; "Give me words in kind,
noble lady, for my fair service!"

"Fairer thanks than words will I pay thee,
Sir Minstrel," replied the gratified damoiselle,
as she smoothed the ruffled plumage of her
favourite.

“Let them be smiles, then, and of the brightest,” he rejoined, “for the love of the *gai science*.”

“Aye, *golden* ones,” answered the lady, detaching from her person a chain which shone like nothing of less price, and extending it to the minstrel.

“This, for the love of my good hawk; and, touching thy glee-craft, I will pay *that* too, with gold, and smiles, and fair words to boot; so thou wilt sing of battle and falconry, and never a word of man’s love, or woman’s beauty.”

“Perish my harp then!” exclaimed the bard, “and the dull hand that wakes it! Our minstrel ardour, when love and loveliness cease to cherish its fires, dies like a flickering lamp in cavern-vapours!”

“It is well said,” observed Matilda, “though for the hundredth time.”

“It is *truly* said,” he replied—“were it the thousandth.”

“From whence art thou, Sir Bard of Dames?” enquired the lady.

“From fairy-land I, with an especial present from King Oberon; will ye behold it?”

“Aye, though it were Puck himself!” said Matilda.

"Ye have but half named him," replied the man of song, and springing to the thicket, he cried aloud, "PUCKFIST! Elfin! What, ELFIN PUCKFIST, I say! hither!"

And to the amazement of some, and the alarm of others, a diminutive creature, which might be either male or female, human or preternatural, so strangely indefinite was its appearance, emerged slowly from the alder bushes, and presented its very puzzling exterior to the eyes of the cavalcade. It was clothed from head to foot in a tight dress of the same dark green as the minstrel's, and, over that, a tunic of like verdant hue, so extremely short as to display fully the singular length of legs appended to a body of the scantiest longitude imaginable, and with which an equally preposterous length of arms harmonized "*à merveille!*"

These ill proportioned members were attenuated to such a degree of feminine slimness at wrist and ankle, and terminated by feet and hands so remarkably small, that, had not a certain austere and even malignant expression upon an adust and parchment-like visage, together with something of a slightly-bearded upper lip, told another story, it would have

been difficult not to set the creature down as a mere child, and of the gentler order of creation too.

Such being the aspect of this remarkable page, or henchman, it remains but to be added that his immediate office was that of harp-bearer. He drew near to his master slowly and doggedly, casting a sidelong, reluctant glance at the riders, who had, by this time, regained their saddles ; and, as soon as his melodious burden was deposited at the minstrel's foot, seated himself a little apart, upon a broad stone, with his back very cavalierly turned to the spectators—both elbows resting on his knees, and his head upon his clenched hands.

“ Now, by spur and baldric !” exclaimed the Baron of Halton, “ here is an ugly jack-an-ape for the nonce ! Art thou *christian*, Sir Joculator ? ”

“ Our lady forefend else !” was the reply—“ for what dost take me, Sir Knight ? Said I that Puckfist was a child of Mahound ? and ye, fair dames ! why look ye perplexed ? ” he added, seeing that maid Morna and her compeers were keeping at reverent distance, and regarding his urchin with no very delighted looks—a strong belief in the gothic mythology of fay and sprite,

and of the occasional subserviency of those beings to human purpose and power, being as prevalent in that day throughout merry England, as at a much later date in the Caledonian and Welsh highlands. “ Why look ye perplexed and scared ? I promise ye there is little danger in Elfin Puckfist, unless, it may be, at the dead hour, when night and morning are at odds. By St. Nicholas ! there are many of his nation that have less grace and a worse visage ! Under favour, most delicate damsels ! he shall salute the fair hem of your riding-gear ; an' if ye will not grace him with a white hand for a brief kissing while.”

He turned as if to summon the very shapely gallant to this act of reverence, but was arrested incontinently by shriek and cry from the tyring maids ; and, at the same time, by the more tangible resistance of De Aldery's sheathed sword, as the knight admonished him to let his unseemly vassal fall back and begone. Matilda, however, whose good humour was conciliated by the opportune services of Puckfist's master, and who had either more nerve or less credulity than her maids, interposed in behalf of the elfin page.

“ Beseech you, sir knight,” she said, “ do

no courtesy to a liege vassal of King Oberon, lest ban and blight be the best of our own hap, when we next ride by moonlight. Come thou hither, gentle Puckfist ! and discuss unto me what good gifts thou hast brought from fairy land ?”

“ He hears no voice save mine, noble lady,” said the minstrel, “ and speaks no tongue save that of his mother land, where every word melts on the listening ear like the notes of a charmed harp !”

“ Oh,” replied Matilda—“ commend me ever to your bird of sorry plumage, for an especial carol. But I grieve that he is deaf of his Norman ear withal ; what, an’ if we should hold converse of scourge and shackle ? might not *that* do something, thinkest thou, without being translated into this said melodious tongue of his mother land ?”

“ Something it might do, noble Damoiselle,” replied he of the harp—“ but, by Sir Thomas of Beverley ! not for the broad earldom of the great De Mowbray would *I* lift finger (in the way of blow or buffet) against Elfin Puckfist ! He that would rivet shackle, or lay scourge upon Elfin, had need be right sure that he is himself charmed from palsy and

cripple at wrist-bone and ankle-joint—and well if such evil be the worst of his weird!"

The minstrel, or as he was sometimes termed, the "Joculator," had, hitherto, been jocular enough, both in tone and deportment; but this rhapsody was delivered with so much earnestness, that the maidenly portion of his auditors rode some paces yet further back from the suspicious imp, excepting only Matilda, who, however, must not be pronounced wholly free from the weakness of the age.

"Benedicite! Sir Minstrel," she said, "thy page is somewhat too eldritch for us human mortals. Let him keep worshipful distance from these white-faced damsels: and beware, I pray you, that ye encounter not some evil day, with those who, for less than De Mowbray's earldom, or its pettiest barony, would scourge thine elfin back to King Oberon, and hang *thee*, with thine harp around thy neck, upon the next tree."

A flush came upon the cheek of the minstrel, but faded instantly, as he replied—

"God shield it, noble lady! it were foul parting of fair company; and, ere that mischance, I look to string mine harp, once and

again. But should it fall out in Chester-ward,
the fairest merlin in Britain shall plead for
harp and harper."

With this allusion to his recent service, he fell back, and motioned to his extraordinary attendant to resume his burden. The band then moved onwards, until it gained a gentle plot or esplanade of turf, whose smooth, short grass presented as fair a table for banqueting "*al-fresco*" as could be desired by the most fastidiously romantic of

" — Faery damsels, met in forest wide
By knights of Logres, or of Lyones
Launcelot, or Pelleas, or Pellenore!"

CHAPTER VI.

" Is it not strange, that, as ye sung,
Seemed in mine ear a death-peal rung,
Such as in nunneries they toll
For some departing sister's soul ?
Say, what may this portend ?"—

Then first the Palmer silence broke,
(The live-long day he had not spoke)
' The death of a dear friend ! '

Marmion.

The burden of the sumpter-mules was now hastily put in requisition for that important ceremony which old and young, grave and gay, saint and sinner, alike regard with complacent welcome ; and the summons to which has been termed by a facetious poet,

" The tocsin of the soul—the dinner bell ! "

The "onslaught," however, was necessarily postponed until the appearance of the Lord of the feast, whose delay in the rear had, by this, excited the surprise of Matilda, ignorant as she yet was of the work of death which had delayed him.

All eyes lighted up with satisfaction as a band of riders issued from another glade; but with the next moment came disappointment, for they who approached the scene of gastronomic preparation were not the parties expected.

“Our Lady make us patient!” ejaculated Nigel, who, in fact, had evinced no very knightly resignation to the “rage of hunger,” but affected to feel only for the subordinates of the band.

“Our Lady make us patient! these are no carvers for our board. It is the Marshal and his gay minion, De Tunbridge.”

“Now,” said Matilda, with covert scorn, “if they have ridden as far as our good Nigel, there will be splintering of lances, I fear me, for the prize of flaggon and pasty! I pray you, sir knight,” she added, turning to De Aldery,—“Ride out from this our festal leaguer, and entreat of yonder gallants that they alight in peace, and partake of this poor banquet upon the turf; lest the pride of chivalry descend to run a tilt for venison and double ale.”

The melancholy cavalier remained motion-

less in his saddle, and replied only by “struggling at a smile.”

“De Aldery scorns our entreaty,” added the lady with a peculiar glance. “We will sue elsewhere. Baron of Halton, dost thou also refuse to bear greeting to the marshal?”

“St. Mary!” cried the baron, “If it be your pleasure I will bear such greetings as may be thrust down his proud throat at point of lance. But to no banquet will I bid Hugh de Montgomery, save that where blood is poured forth instead of wine!”

“Rein up, then!” said Matilda, sharply, “and let me pass: not from a *third* of your proud order will I take refusal. Follow, my maids! I will myself do mine own embassy, and shame these discourteous riders!”

And, to the astonishment of all, she struck her palfrey with the rod, and started out to confront the approaching party. Nigel stared in stupid silence; but De Aldery, hastily riding up, caught the embroidered rein, and exclaimed,

“Noble lady! *this* passes a jest. Unmeet subjects for merriment, at this evil juncture, are yonder riders. I do beseech you, turn.”

“Let go my rein! sir knight!” said Matilda,

with an earnestness which deepened the surprise and embarrassment of her detainer. “Now, by our Lady!” continued the fiery damsel, with increased energy, “unhand my palfrey, or I cry aloud for rescue upon friend or foe!”

“This is the very madness of self-will!” said the knight. “Not in the eye of Montgomery and his minion should the kinswoman of Hugo Lupus thus demean herself. Away! if this light humour must needs hold, I will myself be the unhonoured messenger;” and suddenly quitting her grasp, he started into a gallop, and was almost instantly face to face with the Marshal and his companions.

We have thus regained the point from which we ventured to digress in the early part of last chapter; for such was the mission of De Aldery when he rode up as then described. He certainly discharged it with a better grace than its absurdity seemed to render possible—absolved both the Earl of Chester and himself from all participation in the greeting, and limited the whole to a simple request of the Lady Matilda, that, “of their courtesy, they would not pass without brimming one goblet to the speedy vengeance of

the Marchers over the savage Cymri of the west."

"A fair pledge," returned Montgomery, with the cold sternness of his ordinary manner; "the which it grieves me that I may not honour, being sworn upon the blessed rood to drink no wine until I have discharged me of a vow in Winchester. Command me to the lady, fair sir; and so report."

"But, by St. Thomas!" cried De Tunbridge, whose eyes sparkled with the invitation, "there is no churlish vow hanging around my neck; and were there such, full blythely would I break it, and travel barefoot to Rome for dispensation, ere the right noble Damoiselle had discourteous answer from me in this matter of the wine-cup."

"Oh, doubtless, doubtless!" said Montgomery. "*Par amours, par amours*, though the couch were of snakes and scorpions! Get thee hence with thy smooth visage and dainty array! I think thou art snatching at such courtesy from the Dame as would be scarce proffered thee by her kinsman, Hugo, wert thou gasping here with the hot thirst of Tophet-pit upon thy lips. Here is a gallant, fair sir," (turning to De Aldery,) "who, for a

glance of the damsel's eye, will pledge her, although the goblet mantled with juice 'o' toads! Thou hast mine answer."

"And mine," said De Tunbridge; "the which I pray De Aldery to grace with his best utterance, and speedily, or it is like I may prove my own messenger!"

The envoy rode off without word or sign.

"Now, afore God!" said the Marshal, "we are bounden to this malapert maiden. Speed thee, Sir Ilbert, and win favour in her eyes, for if thy dangling locks and fluttering braveries can flaunt thee into such grace, by Peter's keys! they will have done better service than ever yet fell out from them."

"How mean ye?"

"No matter. I do perceive a golden ball in thy path—beware that thou spurn it not aside. The lands and castles of Matilda de Aquila were no fool's bauble. Away, Sir Ilbert, and bark! Greet Du Coci yet again, and bid him claim from me purveyance of meet lodging in the city. Have a smooth brow in the eye of Luples. Look well to the fair dame; and, withal, strive thou to have some speech with De Aldery when he hath learnt his kinsman's fate—'tis manifest that

he yet wots not of the evil. If thou canst direct the lean and blackened finger of Suspicion upon Northumbria's Earl—Ha! good Sir Ilbert! think well on that! William de Aldery will be clamorous in his revenge and grief!"

Thus tutored, De Tunbridge rode towards the stream, sitting gallantly erect, with flying love-locks, glittering vest, and waving plume. His pace was, perhaps, the speedier, that, in spite of a good share of natural effrontery, he could not repress an inclination to approach Matilda rather in the absence than presence of her powerful kinsman, who was not likely to approve either of the lady's superfluous hospitality to one of a bitterly opposed faction, or the easy acceptance of the invited party.

Alighting and doffing his plumed bonnet with his most courtly grace, he drew near to the beauty of the western marches, and paid his first greeting with a profound obeisance. No inapt representative of the youth of his age and class, when, according to the venerable monk of Malmesbury, "there was flowing hair and extravagant dress, and shoes with curved points, and when the young men were

delicate and minced in their gait, and walked with loose gestures."

Nigel and De Aldery, both severely plain in attire, looked with scorn upon such effeminate parade ; and the looks of all around savoured of any thing rather than hospitable welcome. Matilda alone displayed an unclouded brow and some approach to courtesy, but not without her accustomed dash of sarcasm. Sir Ilbert, upon his part, dazzled at once by her beauty, and embarrassed by the wild naïveté of her demeanour, as well as the doubtful tone of her address, could only throw together, somewhat incoherently, a few conventional flourishes of gallantry, which the fair one scattered in empty air by saying abruptly —

" Now, so help me our Lady of Bangor ! as this is a right strange error—I have mistaken a band of courtiers for a bevy of pilgrims !"

" Marry," replied the guest, " in some sort, Hugh de Montgomery may well be termed pilgrim, for he is under as strict a vow as ever was sandalled shaveling, and may not honour his lip with a touch of your proffered goblet. For myself, most lovely lady ! a blessed pilgrimage will I account it that hath led me to so fair a shrine !"

"It is most courtly said," answered Matilda, "and I thank God ye have not dubbed me ~~saint~~, seeing that our good confessor at Chester was pricked through ribs and lungs by a Welsh arrow three sinful months agone, and, as the fiend will have it, I am even yet unshiven. Howbeit, sir knight, in plain phrase, ye are welcome to our poor banquet under the green-wood; and yonder mountain of a marshal, with his many a hundred-weight of rusty iron, and shield like an armourer's anvil, and lance like a weaver's beam, is more than welcome to ride on, and make us quit of his black brow and brawny body.—But see!" she added abruptly, "in good time here comes our loving uncle and his knights; I marvel what owl they have seen hawking at the sun, that they must needs keep such a snail's pace in their wonderment."

It was at this moment that

"A hand unseen, but not remote,"

struck the chords of a harp so wildly, sweetly, and mournfully, that silence deep and instantaneous sank upon all around. The melancholy notes preluded in unmeasured cadence for a few moments, and then swelled into a

solemn dirge, which now rose upon the breeze like the wail of a departing spirit—now died upon the ear like the far-off murmur of ocean when it deepens, rather than breaks, the hush of declining eve. De Aldery was the first to observe—and not without amazement—that the sad melody was produced by no other hand than that of Elfin Puckfist. He gazed, while the lank and shrivelled fingers did their ecostatic work amidst the chords, alternately upon the dwarf and upon his master, who, with folded arms and clouded brow, leaned motionless against an elm. It was not until the music had died away that the latter replied to a touch of De Aldery's lance by a fiery and indignant look, from which the knight's surprised regard was withdrawn by a grasp upon his cloak. He turned and beheld the only apparently *living* feature of Puckfist's countenance—his small, red, ferret eye—gleaming upon him with an expression, which his own consciousness of recent harshness to the creature interpreted as that of malicious triumph; at the same time its skinny hand pointed to the slow-approaching horse-litter, in which were deposited the cold remains of De Waleric. De Aldery again turned, and said in subdued tones—

"What may this bode, Sir Minstrel?"

"The death of a brave man," was the reply.

As this was spoken the Earl of Chester, Du Coci, Cœur d'Acier, and others rode up.

Lupus immediately distinguished the glittering person of Sir Ilbert, and suspected that the knight had rendered his knowledge of De Waleric's death subservient to a design of addressing Matilda,

"Evil tidings," he said, "have quick wings; is it not thus, Ilbert de Tunbridge?"

"No wings of *my* furnishing," replied the knight. "I cared not to croak a raven's greeting in the ear of the noble maiden, and blanch the cheek of beauty ere my first wondering glance had died upon its roses."

"The Lady Matilda," said Hugo le Loup, with a displeased brow and accent, "will spare further phrase-making, Sir Knight; the rather that, I trust, she comprehendeth them not—having abode chiefly, where, I thank God and our Lady, such oily and silken gear hath never a weleome."

"Your evil tidings, gentle uncle?" said Matilda, "our patience is at death's door."

"If the threatened shafts be for *my* bosom, noble Hugo," said De Aldery, "shoot and

spare not. I have been forewarned," he added with a light air, and glancing at the dwarf, "even now, and that by a strange prophet."

"Good youth!" exclaimed the Earl of Chester, and was about to point his reluctant finger to the litter, when repugnance to the task overmastered the effort. He grasped De Aldery's hand, and was silent. At length he exclaimed aloud, "Fill me some wine there, ho! and sit, good friends, sit all. Let the brimmed goblet pass, and that with traveller's haste, for we must up and away full briefly. Gentle Maud, we pray you know the Knight of the broken lance—*this gallant belike*," indicating Raymond, "ye have known and greeted in times past."

It would have been difficult to guess what feelings lighted up Matilda's eye as it fell upon that of Raymond. Surprise, and eager curiosity at least, although upon *his* brow no answering emotion suggested wherefore. She turned heedlessly from the rival admiration of Du Coci and De Tunbridge, and merely saying, "I would question thee, fair sir, of that paragon, thy lord's daughter"—assigned the youth a place immediately at her side.

"Other counsel," said Raymond, sinking

his voice to its lowest audible tone, "other counsel have I for the Lady Matilda, were the earth silent and the heavens dark."

"Night comes to make them such," she replied, in accents equally depressed, "I ask thee not *whose* counsel craves so gloomy an hour?"

"His token sparkles upon my finger--behold it, as I raise the goblet."

"Walk in the twilight by the city-minster," rejoined the lady, after a glance at the gem alluded to; and then, resuming her self-possession, looked and spoke with indifference.

While these mysterious words were exchanged, the meal proceeded with that dispatch and brevity recommended by the host. The inferior guests anxious to make the best of a passing opportunity, by deglutition "fast and furious," and those of a higher grade cheerlessly silent, from a consciousness of something evil yet to be revealed. A natural hospitality of disposition rendered this dull banquet peculiarly irksome to Hugo Lopus, as, with an uneasy glance, his eye traversed the assemblage.

"I am this day a churlish host," he said with embarrassment; "even thou, Sir Min-

strel, shalt thank thy craft alone for thy good cheer. 'Thou shalt quaff but a purchased goblet; fill therefore, yet again, and to the brim, and call upon the Spirit of song."

"The Spirit of song," replied the harper, "not always demands or obeys such purple inspiration. Moments there are when it comes over us as doth the storm-fiend over the deep; sullen, and fierce, and uninvoked — and the dread impulse will not be restrained! we strike the harp, but the notes wail and languish. We pour the song, but its strains are of death and sorrow!"

"Sit then," rejoined the Earl, "and, even now, strike me thine harp, and pour such strains as the fierce spirit thou talkest of shall list to prompt."

The minstrel obeyed, and to the same dirge-like music which the dwarf had before awoke so ominously, sang with a deep and mellow voice, the following strain:—

WAIL FOR THE DEAD.

Wail for the dead—the mighty dead,
The peerless brave—the spotless true—
The sleepers of the narrow bed
Which never dream of glory knew!

Wail for the knightly spirit flown,
 The generous bosom still'd for aye—
 The arm of terror feebler grown
 Than worms which gorge it as their prey !
 Wail for the dead !

Wail for the dead—but mix for him
 Who dies on conquest's golden verge,
 A tone of rapture in the hymn—
 A note of triumph in the dirge—
 For him earth's sweetest sounds arise,
 To peal on valour's closing ear,
 The plaudit shouts that rend the skies
 When Victory lifts her soldier's bier !
 Wail for the dead !

Wail for the dead—the early dead,
 Who perish in the morn of Fame,
 Ere yet her glorious noon hath shed
 The lustre meet for warrior's name !
 For them may youthful beauty wake
 At sorrow's loneliest hour to weep,
 Alas ! that sorrow cannot break
 Sullen oblivion's iron sleep !

Wail for the dead !

Wail for the dead—the injured dead—
 And doubly—deeply wail for those
 Whom not the shaft of war hath sped,
 But ambush'd murder's felon-blows !
 Oh, mock not them with tear or groan !
 But, fierce as winter's stormiest flood,
 Let vengeance in her prophet-tone
 From earth to Heaven cry "blood for blood !"
 Wail for the dead !

Wail for the dead—but wake—oh wake
 Stern dweller of the trampled breast !
 Thou of the thirst which will not slake,
 The burning pulse which will not rest.
 Shrunk be the coward-hand which lets
 Thy ‘cup of trembling’ drop, and lives,
 Withered the bosom that *forgets*—
 Accurst the caitiff who *forgives* !

Wail for the dead !

The repast had ceased—the goblet stood untouched—a deep silence hung upon his auditory, as the minstrel suspended both harp and voice; and De Aldery, upon whose ear the lay had rang like a presaging descant, was the first to break the melancholy hush.

“Hugo le Loup,” he said, “this ditty flaps a raven-wing against my heart ! Keep peace no more—the sorrow that is mine, give me, that I may grapple with it !”

“William de Aldery !” replied Le Loup, slowly arising, “thou *hadst* a kinsman ! up ! and behold him ! he sleeps as all must sleep — !”

* * *

Montgomery knew not De Aldery when he foretold that he would be clamorous in his grief—“deep, not loud,” was the anguish which made the lip of the sufferer white,

and his brow clammy. For some minutes he leaned powerless — motionless — wordless against the litter, pressing his gauntleted hand against his brow. His eye riveted a glassy stare upon the dead, and then slowly rose to meet the gloomy sympathy of Lupus, as if silently demanding the explanation he had no voice to ask.

“ This,” said the Earl, “ is the work of the crouching Saxon ! never from other hands than theirs had these deadly shafts found so noble a mark ! *Sainte mère du Ciel !* ” he added, looking upwards, “ so help me thou and thy blessed Son as, were I king but for a day, I would root me out the accursed race, sapling and tree ! ”

“ Out upon the lurking felons ! ” said Nigel of Halton, “ did one drop of De Waleric’s blood flow in *my* veins, I would spare neither woman nor babe in my revenge ! ”

“ Brave spirit ! ” said Matilda, who gazed upon the spectacle of the gory litter indignantly, but with little surprise, and as little of feminine horror or repugnance. “ Brave spirit ! Herod of Jewry was but milky-livered to thee. But, ere another ‘ slaughter of the

innocents,' it were well, methinks, that De Aldery knew indeed upon whom vengeance should fall. Murder hath been done ere now by Norman as well as Saxon."

"Aye, by mine honour, noble lady, ye speak sooth," said De Tunbridge, "there be, who, after this fashion, have rid them of those they loved not, with steel that never came upon Saxon stithy. For mine own part, little would I reck were the whole blue-eyed race of Hengist and Horsa swept from the face of Britain; but it were pity that the good knight should strike causeless in the South when, it may be, a just vengeance calls unheard in the *North*."

"The *North*," echoed De Aldery, starting with a sudden wildness—"the North?"

"Nay," said De Tunbridge, (fearful that the suggestion was a little too broad,) "north, west, or east—I did but speak at random. But here is Raymond of the heart of steel, (modestly so called,) he was at the bridle-rein of De Waleric when the deed was done, and may best tell what manner of caitiffs they seemed that shot thus murderously; moreover, why they who were so bloody of hand looked pitifully upon him?"

"*Thou, Raymond! thou* travelling with De Waleric?" exclaimed Matilda. "*Thou!* and spared by his murderers?"

"St. Mary!" cried Nigel, "hadst thou no weapon, Sir Squire?"

"Hadst thou no followers, good youth?" said De Tunbridge.

The party thus suspiciously questioned shot upon each successive speaker a fiery glance; and then, as if perforce, replied, but to Matilda alone—

"Yes, lady! I saw De Waleric slaughtered, and yet live!—sated with *his* blood, the hunters thirsted not for *mine*; *why* they have thus slaughtered—deep Hell, that prompted, may reveal—*why* they have thus *spared*—yon merciful Heavens know—not I! And wherefore,—” he added, turning fiercely upon the other querists—“ wherefore am I thus darkly questioned? Speak *thou*, De Aldery, thou whom sorrow may privilege to be unjust, if even sorrow can so change a noble nature, speak, and frankly avouch what these around dare but to suggest—that *I* too have had portion in this work of blood—I! whom their own retainers cut from the bonds which held me powerless as a swathed infant!"

"Nay, by St. George!" exclaimed Du Coci,

"ye shall write *me* guiltless of the evil thought, for well do I believe that never had lurking felon, Saxon or Norman, such speech and bearing as thine!"

"Say more!" replied the youth with increasing vehemence—"avouch thee guiltless of yet blacker injustice, and swear that upon no *loftier* name than mine this blur of calumny hath fallen even from thy darkest thought!"

"Patience of heaven! whither next?" said Matilda, "this is the right gallop of Passion's frantic steed—hoofed with fire and bitted with gossamer!"

De Tunbridge, who better understood the allusion, said coldly, "Upon *whom* loftier hath any here thrown blur or blot?"

Raymond strode in front of the knight, until their mutually flushed cheeks were almost within span's breadth of each other, and then said with concentrated bitterness—

"Aye! upon *whom?* *that* do I ask of *thee*? and dare thee to the utterance of *a name*!"

"Insolent slave!" exclaimed the provoked Sir Ilbert. "Bandy again such look and speech with me, and, by the honour of my house, I 'll strike thee to my foot, and scourge thee into silence with a dog-leash!"

Instantly the throat of each was in the other's gripe—but De Aldery, roused by this from his stupor, dragged them apart—

“This quarrel,” he said, “is mine, and I have bound it upon my soul to seek the issue. Raymond Cœur d'Acier! approach—look upon this ruin!”

“Fixedly!” said the squire; and, taking the cold hand of the dead, he thus apostrophized the parted spirit,—

“Victor in many fights! art thou indeed thus low and cold and mute! thus stricken down by churls who in a fair field had trembled at the flutter of thy pennon! and shall not Vengeance yet reddens her right hand in the blood of thy destroyers?—oh, noble De Waleric! the brave—the generous—and the true! When I forget thee, I—who beheld this butchery, and might not with my fettered hand strike one blow to save or to avenge—When I forget who first poured into my boyish breast, and placed in my young grasp, the spirit and the steel of manhood—Give me, eternal Heavens! the shallow grave of a coward, that meaner things than the earth-worm may tear me piecemeal from!”—

“Go!” said the kinsman of the slain, pluck-

ing the arm of Raymond from the litter ; “ go, —I suspect not thee, nor thy proud Lord !”

“ The better,” answered the squire, resuming his air of defiance—“ the better for thine honour and thy safety. Look ! there are names, sir knight, so pure that, but to *breathe* upon them with suspicious thought, is shame and ruin to the asperser !”

“ Now, by St. Grimbald !” exclaimed the Earl of Chester, “ this passes human patience ! over malapert and wordy art thou, sir squire, for this presence, and if thou art not hence in ten throbs of thy hot pulse, I will repay thee in strange fashion ! away ! Give him a steed there for his master’s sake !”

“ Reserve thy courtesy,” said Raymond, “ for those who sue to thee, proud Earl ! and shame be to De Mowbray’s meanest serf who would crave such at the hand of Hugo Lupus—the *mouth-friend* of his lord !”

Thus saying, and after confronting, for a moment the whole band, as one who takes the odds of a hundred, the fiery youth bounded fairly across the broad rivulet, and plunging into the wood upon its bank, was almost instantly lost to sight.

The audacity of his farewell, however, drew

more than one hand to the sword hilt, and more than one foot to the broad stirrup ; but Hugo, who, perhaps, had his own reasons for avoiding extremities of blood, checked the fury of his retainers.

"Let him pass free," he said ; "he hath the brazen bearing and haughty tongue of the devil, but the knightly fire and spirit of St. George himself!"

"Aye, by the jaws of the great dragon !" said Du Coci, "and that will be seen and felt when time hath buckled a gilt spur upon his heel ! Meanwhile, shame were it that he should plod to Winchester a-foot, like a base shepherd-churl ! I pray ye, noble Hugo, lend me the proffered courser for mine own varlet, and I will mount hot Raymond upon De L'Epee's—if he will take such courtesy at my hand."

Even this indulgence was accorded, and De L'Epee hastily prepared his good nag for the transfer. While Sir Alberic threw himself into the saddle, De Tunbridge who saw, or fancied, in this timely attention to *the squire*, an attempted, and not improbable, medium of reconciliation with *the master*, hastened to slide

in a phrase of parting civility, and to infer the message of Montgomery.

"Commend me to the Marshal," was the reply, "I will look for nothing less at his hand. And so, fair sir, should the many windings of this villainous forest sever good company, farewell until we meet in Winchester! Follow, good Nicholas! By St. Hubert! the fiery varlet will take me for a pursuer of other stamp, and I may come by a broken coxcomb for my fair purpose." So saying he rode off.

By this the orders of Earl Hugo were issued for departure, and the whole band was presently accoutred and *en route* for the WHITE CITY, by which gentle and immaculate name the good town of Winchester was distinguished in olden days, even from the time of the Romans.

CHAPTER VII.

" My God ! what thing is this ? "

Mungo Park.

WHEN De Mowbray's squire, after his irreverent farewell to the Earl of Chester, shot into the forest-covert, it was not without an expectation of being pursued ; and, although brave as youthful enthusiasm could render him, and in that mood of excitement which spurns at reflection, he was by no means heroically indifferent to the penalties of his conduct.

Above all, Raymond looked with great horror upon imprisonment. He was sufficiently master of himself, indeed, to choose the most prudential mode of travel, by plunging into the most tangled and secluded tracts of the woodland ; at the same time endeavouring to preserve such *directness* of course as might secure him from having night, as well as day to spend in those leafy solitudes.

There was something, however, in this sort of laborious pedestrianism (having frequently to *break* as well as to *pursue* his way), which speedily disgusted one to whom the saddle was a more familiar seat than a chamber couch, and who regarded with contempt a mode of journeying equally tedious and disreputable; to which, in fact, only the mere serf was condemned. He paused at length before a seemingly impenetrable barrier of wood, looked fretfully around him, spurned with an idle petulance the mossy bars of his verdant prison, and then broke into exclamation—

“ Now palsy and drife wither the hands that shot those accursed shafts into my gallant steed! but for that evil hap I had not been thus delayed when never was haste more needful!—nor bandied words with yonder Earl—nor dragged, as I have thus far done, through bush and brake like a skulking felon—nor been compelled to enter the fair city a-foot, like a base Saxon groom! but it skills not,” he added in a more resolved tone—“ it skills not battling with necessity—no, by our Lady! nor with these giant oaks and elms—hap what hap may, the free path and the open glade for Raymond!”

"Aye, go!"—said a strange voice, which seemed to issue from the coppice—"and the shackles of the tyrant Norman fall heavily upon thee, thou despiser of the Saxon!"

"Who speaks, in the fiend's name!" cried the youth, astonished and, perhaps, not wholly unalarmed at the suddenness of the philippic—there was no answer.

He fixed his eye keenly, and bent a quickened ear in the direction of the ominous accents, awaiting for several minutes their renewal—but no sound broke upon the evening stillness; and every attempt to obtain even a glimpse of the mysterious speaker, by drawing apart the thick masses of foliage, and gazing into the recesses they overshadowed, was equally abortive. Neither sound nor sight indicated whether the accents were from mortal lips, or those of a wandering demon. Let not the youthful listener be too harshly judged if he inclined rather to a belief in the latter.

"Have we spirits here!" he exclaimed, with a slight shudder, and signing the cross as he spoke.

"An evil spirit to thee, Raymond of the heart of steel!" resumed the Invisible. "In trackless forest, and in crowded path—in field and

in town—in camp and in bower—by land and flood—by the festal hearth, and in God's holy church—a fearful watch will I hold over thee ! Beware thou of a thought which hath evil in it towards the Saxon ! Spurn not thou a dog which hath the oppressed Saxon for its lord ! Beware, I say ! for there is yet in the quiver of the avenger a shaft deadly as that which even now, and at thy very side, struck to the earth that Norman tyrant—— !”

“ Ha !” exclaimed Raymond—“ art thou indeed of that felon band ? then, look to thy accursed self ! for, by the light of heaven ! there is no depth of fen or forest which shall be long a quiet lair for the butchers of De Waleric !”

“ Of WHOM, saidst thou ?” cried the Invisible, with a voice sharpened as it were by an instantaneous burst of rage and astonishment.—

“ Out upon thee, miscreant !” rejoined the youth—“ not again shall the name of De Waleric be named to thee until the fiend whose slave thou art, body and soul, shall howl it into thy dying ear !”

“ LIAR !” shouted the voice, with the exasperation of one maddened by some hideous

discovery—"it was *De Mowbray* and not *De Waleric*—or withered for ever be the hand that shot the shaft!"

"Murderous caitiff!"—exclaimed Raymond, upon whom a light broke with the last words, a blessed *truth* do I speak to thee; and the father of lies hath lied thee into a slaughter, savage, causeless, and fruitless! *De Mowbray lives!* Lives, as I well trust, to learn, ere long, that raven and kite and hound have gorged upon thy felon limbs!"

"Rather," answered the Invisible with more composed bitterness—"bid thy fierce lord remember that one false shaft breaks not the bow—exhausts not the quiver! The quarry, which in the morning beam laughs from its cloud upon the baffled falcon below, may yet, ere the fall of night, shrink in a bloodier clutch!—For thee, peevish braggart! whose threats are as the flitting down of the thistle, whose very life trembled but an hour ago at my dagger's point—I know thee, stripling, who thou art, and of what haughty stock the sole-left scion—a race upon whose hands, this many a year, the blood of the Saxon hath never dried! Blood, not alone of resisting man, but of defenceless woman—even of *her*—that

wretched one—who gave thee birth! for in THY veins runneth a portion of that despised current! and at THY hands (child of a hapless union! son of the proud Norman and of the degenerate Saxon, who basely stooped to wed with the trampers down of her kindred), at THY hands will I require it—even I, THE AVENGER! Fearfully will I require it, if in the career which thine ambition now urgeth, as a frantic rider goadeth a headlong steed, thou lightenest not the yoke which many a minion of the red Tyrant hath laid upon the neck of our oppressed ones! Laugh to scorn what I areed thee, and by the wrung spirits of all our martyrs! I will show thee, when time is, the avenging deed for the warning word! An eye not marked shall be upon thee—a foot unheard shall pursue—a hand unseen shall avenge! and the last of a mighty line shall perish as in a cleft of the rock, where Honour looks not upon death, and where the voice of praise is silent for ever! Now," concluded this strange monitor, "away, upon thy lord's mission and thine own! I also depart, but, whither, who shall declare?"

There was a rustling stir amongst the foliage in the direction of the voice, and then the

crash of boughs, as if with a heavy descent through them to the ground beneath; no petty height, judging by the duration of the sounds. Immediately afterwards all was perfect stillness.

So great was the astonishment of Raymond at all the circumstances of this singular greeting, that several moments elapsed before he fairly roused himself for pursuit. Almost the first bound to where the voice uttered its denunciations, precipitated him through birch and alder into the bed of a streamlet, which the summer drought had shrunk to a silver thread. It was as darkly shadowed with masses of incumbent foliage, as Milton's delicious

"——— brooks
Of Vallambrosa, where the Etrurian shades
High over-arch'd embower —."

Here, however, it seemed to Raymond, the Invisible had descended, and, confident in his own speed and activity, the youth bounded along its shingly course, until further progress was rendered impracticable by the channel narrowing between banks too close and steep for a human body either to thread or scale. Whether the few moments of starting time involuntarily afforded

to the pursued by the amazement of the pursuer, had given the former irretrievable advantage, or whether he had availed himself of some local intimacy with the tangled wilds through which he fled, or rather vanished,—certain it is that Raymond was at length compelled to abandon the pursuit, without so much as a glimpse of its object, or the slightest indication of the route by which he had so strangely evaded him.

Quitting the shadowy water-course, he clambered its left bank, reached an open glade of the forest, breathless with exertion, and flung himself amidst the grass, at once to take brief rest, and to ruminate upon the strangeness of the adventure.

It seemed to admit of no doubt, that the object of his unsuccessful chase was one—perhaps the chief—of De Waleric's assassins; but so great had been the horror and confusion, the suddenness and the rapidity of that tragic deed, that Raymond could not recall a defined image of any one of its actors. The voice of his unseen monitor was that of one certainly beyond the middle age, and judging from a sort of oriental or scriptural euphony in his diction, connected probably with a religious

order. It was in that day not quite so difficult to reconcile the latter supposition with the imputation of deadly violence, as the former—that of advanced age—with the agile adroitness of his escape, especially from a pursuer, who had all the advantage of youthful vehemence, and the elastic spring of the wild-cat.

Two circumstances, however, were both manifest and striking;—first, the familiar personal knowledge of Raymond—of his views, rank, and descent, not merely asserted by the Invisible, but implied by his expressions,—knowledge which the youth had conceived to be shut exclusively in his own bosom. And secondly, the inadvertent discovery that the shafts which pierced De Waleric had, in reality, been designed for the bosom of De Mowbray. It was a strong though puzzling comment upon the first of these circumstances, that the assassins had contented themselves with merely putting him in bonds, when his fellow-travellers were heedfully dispatched. As to the second, it was consistent enough with the known fact of a strong resemblance between the Earl and the Knight; and Raymond well knew that his lord, although not tyrannical, *con amore*, or gratuitously, was yet,

as one of the great dividers of the spoil, sufficiently obnoxious to the Saxons to provoke such an attempt at his destruction.

While the perplexed and harassed Raymond thus took breath and thought, his cogitations were broken by the sound of approaching hoofs, and almost before he had started to his feet, Du Coci and his squire galloped within bow-shot.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. Puff.—Have ye any more great guns to fire off?

Prompster.—Not just now, Sir.

Mr. Puff.—Very well, then let us have a little soft music.

The Rehearsal.

“WELL met in the greenwood, Sir Squire
of the North! up and away! thou art lawful
captive.”

“Captive to whom? and wherefore?”

“Captive to the good knight y’clept, ‘SIR COURTESY,’ for pacing a-foot like peasant-churl, or villain-recreant; the whilst his proffered courser prances with empty saddle.”

“Oh, cry ye mercy!” said Raymond, seizing the rein of the good steed, “I yield me—rescue or no rescue.”

“Mount and away, then!” answered he of the broken lance, “thy ransom shall be a gallop with us, in all good fellowship, to the fair city of Winchester.”

“Content,” said the squire, “provided I

have leave to shape mine own course, and keep mine own counsel, when we have once ridden under the shadow of Ealden Mynster."

"Then and there," answered the knight, "thou mayst put fetterlock upon lip, and ride to the foul fiend an' ye list; meanwhile, up, I say, and spur for the heavens! we will each question as boldly, and reply as scrimply as may seem good and fitting to our sapient selves, ha?"

"Content again," replied his new companion, "and first, from whose stable comes this goodly prancer?"

"Tush, man!" said Du Coci, "give him the rowel as freely as though thou hadst seen him foaled in Bamborough stalls, and trouble not thy brain touching whence he comes, or what compound of mortal clay hath backed him before thee. What boots it cumbering a man with names? *Thou* art, as I take it, Raymond, and so forth, squire of the body to the pre-potent Robert of Northumberland; *I* am a troubadour, y'clept the Knight of the broken lance; and *this* is my very valorous and exceedingly christian Nicholas de l'Epee, whom I pray you to know, for the honour of squirehood."

"I promise you, sir," said Nicholas, after

some movements of courtesy had passed between the neophytes, “the cavalier and I will be sworn brethren before nightfall.”

Raymond scanned the visage of the speaker sharply, as if to estimate the character of one who asserted with such confidence an approaching familiarity, and seemed determined upon proving a very Pylades or ‘*fidus Achates*.’ The result of the scrutiny did not seem favourable. “Methinks,” he replied with indifference, “our time of mutual travel is brief for the building up so weighty a matter as a sworn brotherhood.”

“Not a jot,” said Nicholas, “we will run it up like the quick walling of a breach in a besieged town at midnight.”

“To be struck down with ram and catapult at peep of dawn,” rejoined Raymond.

“Very like, very like,” responded Nicholas, “and methinks, I should breathe at nostrils after that. But I pray you, fair sir, how oft hath the blessed sun gone round since ye were indeed sworn brother with human thing in yonder city.”

“In yonder city,” repeated Raymond, with a hesitating accent, and a perplexed smile, “I know not if I could tell ye unblushingly

with what manner of human thing I was once driven to hold companionship in the White City."

"Oh, gramercy for your bashfulness!" said Du Coci, "forth with it, and shame the foul fiend."

"Some soft vessel of painted frailty," said De l'Epée, "a swineherd's daughter mayhap, with goodly ancles, and a marvellous proper visage."

"Or a white sister of St. Benedict," said the knight, "that better loved a couch in the greenwood, and the matins of the lark, than bell, book, and cloister."

"Or a fat abbess," continued the squire, "with a span-broad forehead, and cherry lips, and a goodly brooch on her plump arm, y'written '*amor vincit omnia.*'"

"No, by our Lady, sirs," answered the gallant, half blushing, half laughing, as if uncertain whether his confession would savour more of the culpable or the ridiculous—"it was a son of the stiff-necked race, upon whose name be sorrow—an unbelieving Jew!"

Du Coci and his retainer looked upon each other for a moment, and then mutually burst into a long, loud, and irrepressible fit of laugh-

ter. In vain did the astonished subject of their merriment draw the rein of his steed, and challenge explanation, with half offended glances levelled alternately at each—again and yet again, after as many vain attempts to forbear, they renewed their obstreperous cachinnations with tenfold zest and heartiness.

“Cry you mercy, gentle squire!” exclaimed Du Coci at last—large risible drops actually chasing each other down his cheeks. “Ye have well begun a merry journey! Now, so pardon me, Mother Church and our Lady, as I could not choose but laugh to think that, having eyes in thine head——.”

“Softly, I pray you,” interrupted Nicholas, “let every man ravel out his own tangled yarn. What ye were about to discuss is my especial matter. Well,” (turning to Raymond,) “I also crave pardon, fair sir, for making my ribs sore at your cost; but, by the staff of Jacob, ye made a goodly choice! come! more, more, I pray you, more of this tawny-browed son of the ass which stoopeth between two burdens—this black-bearded unbeliever that ye were so fain to brother.”

“Say *beardless*, rather,” answered Raymond, “for methinks fourteen years will scarce

roughen even the chin of a Jew. But enough. *More* of mine unbeliever will I not tell you, Sir Squire; suffice it that I know not now whether he be bearded to the girdle, like other of his pawn-exacting tribe, or laid at rest where the worm will one day beard us all. If yet alive, he is nearer the clouds by six summers' growth since we parted—parted, as I bethink me, at no great distance from this very ground."

"Oh, by St. Antony!" cried the knight.

"Peace yet again, for our Lady's sake!" interrupted Nicholas once more. "Knowledge is a crust to be hard begged for ere it be thrust into the wallet. Ye say well, sir," (again addressing Raymond,) "ye say well—a man's counsel is not to be dragged out of him as with a cord, nor his secrets as with a cart-rope: but, by your leave, sir, we of the chivalry of Christendom, being uncontaminate with Pagan, or Israelitish, or other such unbelieving fellowship, may well demand assurance that ye have done meet penance for the same, and reconciled ye to Mother Church. Marry, in these evil days, it behoves a man to eschew the accursed thing. He that would shun defilement where the seething of pitch is toward, must keep his body out of sprinkling distance."

"Tush! thou immaculate fellow," said Raymond, stifling a laugh in his turn, and beginning to see the sort of oddity he had to deal with. "Clap me this unguent to thy queasy conscience—I have gotten me absolution for the sin; and a dispensation, moreover, to tamper yet again with the like companionship, provided ever that the unbelieving dogs come by the worst of our traffic. For example, tonight, at the fitting hour, I must to the cavern of a Jewish sorcerer, subtle and potent in his art as ever at need drew sign or sigil, or bound a spirit of ill to his bidding, with muttered word of the cabbala. Now, might it sort with your pleasure to look upon this learned Rabbi in his hour of potency, and to behold some pleasing sample of his art,—as, the up-calling of a Familiar, nay, it might be—if ye were much desirous, of the great Fiend himself—I say, sir, were ye thus minded, methinks, for the sake of the sworn brotherhood ye have predicated between us, I would risk somewhat to become warrant for your safe going and coming. Marry, though, ye must beware of speech, and keep firm footing within circle, lest, peradventure, the evil thing turn and rend. In your own phrase, he that would shun jeopardy when

there be hoofs and horns toward, must keep his body out of goring and trampling distance."

Nicholas de L'Epée listened to this rhodomontade with an affectation of profound gravity.

"Sir," he replied, "ye proffer well and courteously, and with a christian heedfulness to my especial safety, body and soul. But I would fain learn upon what singular errand ye are yourself about to step into the den o' the dragon? an' if it be not impertinently curious to —— ha?"

"Oh, beseech you," said Raymond, "ask, and spare not; Modesty is the foolish gleaner that picks me never a grain, while nimble Impudence carries off the whole sheaf. I go, sir, upon a quest lawful and good—to regain *mine own*, even from the clutch of a Jew and a Sorcerer!"

"And *that*, methinks," replied Nicholas, "is what a holy clerk would call a rending of the prey from the spoiler—an extracting of sweets from the devourer's maw. Well, and the treasure that is to reward this feat?"

"A talisman," answered Cœur d'Acier, "a mighty talisman. In other hands, perchance,

of little value, or, at the best, a glittering toy; but once restored to *mine*—trust me, fair sirs,” he added, with an animation which betokened that some exciting *reality* was ‘shadowed out’ by all this extravagant mysticism, “ trust me, it shall achieve for its possessor no petty conquest—no momentary triumph ! all that the full heart burns for—more than the exulting lip recks or yet dares to avow, shall then as surely obey my call as the leaves of this mighty forest the voice of awakening summer !”

“ Have with you, sir knight of the talisman !” exclaimed Nicholas ; “ I take your proffer, and blythely ! for one glimpse of such a miracle I would jeopard me against the horn and hoof of every fiend in limbo !”

“ Why then,” said Raymond, “ the devil take thee indeed ! for a meddling fool, who hast neither wit nor grace to keep thy busy fingers out of other men’s budgets, until they are chopped off by the knuckle-joints.”

“ In the clout ! in the clout !”* cried Sir Alberic ; “ by St. Hubert, he hath shot the shaft of observation into the very heart of thy mystery ! But, away with this mummery of

* Phrase in archery, see King Lear. The clout is the bull’s eye.

charm and spell ; we burn day-light amiss to dwell upon it. *Here,*" continued the light-hearted adventurer, tossing his lance aloft, and catching and brandishing it as it fell—here is my talisman ! better was never yet, since Merlin laid blessing upon *Tintadgel*!* and, by our Lady of Winchester, far and strangely am I deceived in thee, good Raymond, if thy witchcraft is not of a like order ; the magic of cut and thrust ! the charm of stout blows given and taken—ha ! that is the enchantment meet for spirits like mine and thine ! nay, I can read thee, sir squire, as freely as thou hast looked through Nicholas de L'Epee.—What man ! I saw and heard when yonder riders galled thee with their dark questions touching De Waleric's death. But with mine own honour would I answer for thine, as freely as ever a champion of injured worth vouched for the cause he battled in. And soon—full soon will such a warranty be at lack—there are who will accuse thee to the king—aye, with no gentle voice."

"White-livered slanderers !" cried the youth.
"I laugh, defy, and spit at them ! Look—

* Name in romances for King Arthur's lance.

"Hugo Lupus," said the young squire, with a guarded accent and manner, "hath a right fair kinswoman."

"Oh, a peerless one!" cried Sir Alberic.

"A lovely one," rejoined his new friend; "but yet——"

"But yet!" iterated Du Coci, "well! I forgive thee—but is it not so?"

"Why, what did I aver?" said Raymond, smiling.

"Much, in those two brief words; as, that her tresses shadow a haughty brow—that lip and eye scatter but beautiful disdain and radiant scorn. Is it not so? or, haply, thou wouldest infer that upon the face of this unworthy earth there walks a vision yet more glorious—one fairer than perfection. Tell me where such a paragon makes the air proud with breathing it, and I will go a barefoot pilgrimage to kiss the sod that is honoured with her tread!"

"By our Lady," said the squire, "that would be scant wisdom, to guide so hot a worshipper to my own loved shrine."

"Nor shall it need," replied the adventurer. "To the fiend with false worship! I am

sworn bigot for ever to yonder dark-eyed divinity of Chester."

"Be not too loud in adoration," said Raymond, "lest a rough-handed zealot I wot of, snatch the idol to another temple."

And having thus spoken, he attempted to change a conversation of which the topic was obviously distasteful to him. This, however, it was not easy to accomplish, so inveterately had Sir Alberic's imagination become engrossed by Matilda's beauty. He broke continually into renewed raptures, and, at length, as by a natural consequence, stumbled upon the delicate question of her minority and wardship, assuring Raymond that he doubted not King William would forego no tittle of his royal prerogative, but, maugre the will or the immunities of Hugo Lupus, bestow the youthful beauty upon whomsoever he listed—some fortune-favoured gallant, perhaps, who should render him especial service in field or fort; or "God wot," added the adventurer, "it may be that gold will work better than steel, and he that hath the fairest exchequer may away with the fairest bride: ah! plague upon wardship and reliefs! it was never a merry

world since a good lance might no longer woo
and win a fair dame at her own accorded plea-
sure, with never a gold bezant to king, baron
or bishop."

Cœur d'Acier saw no medium of escape from this unwilling theme, but, by degrees, to quicken their rate of travel; in the hope that some object of varying interest might turn the current of the knight's enthusiasm. This speedily brought their uncertain woodland travelling to terminate upon what was then the high road between London and Winchester; and many indications appeared of their increasing proximity to the latter capital. They passed, or were overtaken by, various parties of variously armed military, headed by nobles, knights, or men-at-arms, all gallantly attired and accoutred, to take their part in the pageantry of the approaching festival; some pacing slowly along with the air of mature warriors, whose scanty and grizzled locks never peeped from under the close-drawn hood of mail; others of a more juvenile and delicate presentment, reining their fiery steeds so as to awake their utmost mettle, and with flowing ringlets wantoning over the hood, which was purposely thrown back to allow

~~Some terms are given to various back-eyed di-~~

"It was the same in Minnesota," said Rayburn. "It was a woman-teacher whose I met of, who is still teaching."

the author of the book, he attempted to
choose a movement of which the topic was
most important to him. This, however,
he did not do successfully, so inveterately
had the silver-mine question become en-
grossed in American history. He broke con-
tacts with his former teachers, and at length,
at the request of a committee established upon
the academic council of his university and
university, among whom Roosevelt was he doubted
to bring it down would bring me title of his
own negative, Mr. George the will or the
adventure a day Japan below the youth-
to have upon whatsoever he listed—some
silver-miner galore, perhaps, who should
have had special service in field or fort;
or "there was," said the adventurer, "it
was to me your wall work better than steel,
you to stand and the silent casque may
over won the distant battle; all! ploughs open,

world since a good lance might: no knyght coude
and win a fair dame at her own accorded plea-
sure, with never a gold besant to king, knyght,
or bishop."

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drawn hood of mail; others of a more young
and delicate presentment, riding their
steeds so as to awake their ~~companions~~ ~~and~~
~~joy~~ ~~and~~ ~~glory~~
~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~day~~
~~and~~ ~~a~~ ~~time~~

King Edward
17 May 2. 1340

those essenced adornments full liberty of descent.

Du Coci's love-raptures melted away before these animated pictures of martial and courtly beauty ; and the fellow-travellers were soon wholly engrossed in the discussion of subjects alike welcome to all. They talked of the recent wars in Normandy and Wales, and of their probable renewal after a very little breathing time—of the characters of the three royal brothers, William, Robert, and Henry ; the fierce ambitious William—the “clerkly” and sagacious Henry—the gallant but luxurious and indolent Robert ; of the resolution then just passed in the great ecclesiastical council at Clermont, to wrest the holy land from the Infidels ; and, finally, of a rumour which had reached Du Coci upon the continent that a body of monastic religious, established near the Blessed City, for the reception and tendance of sick pilgrims, had actually become a *military* order, and girded on the carnal sword for the defence of their pious patients, under the designation of Knights of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem.

“And, by their holy patron,” cried Sir Alberic, “a fair sight will it be to behold

frocked shavelings, and cowled book-a-bosoms
wielding lance and shield against the fiery
Saracen!"

"Aye, marry, sirs," said Nicholas, "but
there be stout priests that will strike ye a
burly blow ; bethink ye of that brawny bishop
who with a huge mallet of lead struck Long-
sword Salisbury out of his saddle."

"And if ye be remembered," added Ray-
mond, "there was De Mowbray's kinsman,
Bishop Geoffry of Coustance—he was no babe
for the nonce with brand or battle-axe, but
would cleave ye his man to the neck-bone
through plate and mail. Nay, to speak nought
of the dead, ye may, for a ride northward,
behold a jolly monk in the abbey of Tyne-
mouth, well-friended of my noble lord, who, for
our Lady's love, will cast ye both out of saddle
and stirrup, before ye can cry 'God sain ye!'"

"Benedicite!" said the Knight, "this were
indeed a fair monk for the mastery ! but, if he
hath schooled him under thy Lord's eye, I mar-
vel the less, and will say nought of saddle and
stirrup until I have forgotten what chanced at
Gloucester some six summers ago—Nay ! toil
not thy wits for my meaning, gentle Raymond,
the matter chanced before the days of thy
squirehood ; or, it is like thou wouldest as

soon have ridden with the great arch-fiend as with the knight of the broken lance."

The reader, perhaps, already comprehends that our friend Raymond had indeed not attached his fortunes to those of the Earl of Northumberland until after the rencontre between that nobleman and Du Coci; and as the latter name had never been pronounced during their chance intercourse, it follows that the squire was profoundly ignorant to whose courtesy he was indebted. Above all, he could never dream for an instant that his agreeable fellow-traveller had once been placed in deadly opposition to the Earl, his master, and was, even yet, if Montgomery spoke sooth, regarded with the bitterest hatred.

By this, the sun was in the far west, declining with calm splendour and softened glory; and notwithstanding their perfect sociality, the riders, after passing the village of *Alton*, were well pleased to find themselves, each after long absence, upon the banks of the gentle *Itchin*, hailing, with perhaps something of the chastened feelings of a modern bard, when addressing the same stream,—

" Its crumbling margin, and its silver breast,
On which the self-same tints still seemed to rest."^{*}

* Bowles' beautiful sonnet to the *Itchin*.

They were now also in full view of WINCHESTER, magnificent and extensive as it then was; its thick-piled masses of dusky architecture, religious, military, and domestic, with their densely-clustered domes and towers and battlements, arising into the dun and smoky atmosphere which ordinarily over-canopies a great city,—the vast cathedral towering above all in solemn and august pre-eminence. A long, low range of western clouds, here intercepting, and there, through golden vistas, admitting, the levelled sunbeam, gave, by its partial agency, that happy effect of light and shadow which painters love to throw upon scenes of architectural magnificence; lighting up a part with fierce and lurid splendour, and mantling the remainder in deep and solemn shade.

CHAPTER IX.

Friend.—Is he not rather too stately for a Beef-eater?

Mr. Puff.—Don't you be too sure that he's a Beef-eater.

The Critic.

PASSING through a long and populous suburb, extending at that time nearly to the town of Worthy, our travellers at length entered Winchester by the north gate ; access to which was given by a drawbridge flung over the city-fosse from the inner wall of a barbican, or fortified outwork.

Just within the gloom of the portal stood three men; two apparently of middle age, and, by their attire, merchants probably, or citizens of repute and substance, many of whom carried on an extensive traffic in wool-lens, and the manufacture of men's caps, receiving, in return, wines and other continental luxuries.

The third, a gallant of more youthful aspect, attired in a light military riding-dress, stood

somewhat apart, as if unconnected with his fellow idlers, to whom he seemed tacitly to suggest a reason for thus lingering almost within ear-shot of their conference, by casting, at intervals, an impatient look towards the barbican, and striding occasionally upon the bridge, with the air of one who *fidgets* for the delayed arrival of a comrade.

As Raymond passed, he exchanged with this youth a glance of significance—neither party uttering a word. The deep gloom of the portal in which the merchants were involved, enabled them, unobserved, to mark, and, for some reason or other, to comment upon, this mute greeting; a bye-play of seeming intelligence, of which nothing caught Du Coci's attention or that of Raymond; as, indeed, to those who rode from the open street beneath the arch, it was difficult to distinguish either form or lineament, while, on the other hand, whoever had loitered for some time *within* the gloom might scrutinise a passer-by with impunity. The entering party rode on.

From the north gate to the High-street, the direct road was through the Jewry, (now called Jail-street,) in which, at that period, and for some time after, great numbers of Jews had

their residence. As the cavaliers rode briskly past the sombre fronts, and huge projecting antique gables of these mansions of evil esteem; many were the jests which our mercurial friend, Du Coci, passed both upon Raymond and upon Nicholas, in allusion to their Jewish magician. Here and there, with the short quick step of anxious though declining age—with sallow front—dark eye—long descending beard, huge girdle, (perhaps a hidden load of keys suspended to it,) and high cap of opprobrious yellow (the badge of all their tribe), some despised, but wealthy son of the promise, issued from the dark, well-guarded precincts of his usurious home. The sullen door grated upon such massy hinges, and was secured with such potent locks, bolts, and chains, as might have become the stronghold of banditti; while the narrow stone-shafted windows, with their ponderous iron stauncheons, accorded with the general air of stern and prison-like security mantling over the gloomy building. All who quitted or approached these domiciles were as fuel to the facetiousness of the knight; but, from some cause or other, those “quilletts of the brain” fell unmarked, or, at least, unrecked upon the ears to which they were chiefly di-

reeted. The Rabbi did but quicken his pace to escape the light glance of the Nazarene. Raymond, lost in abstraction, seemed to measure the height and breadth of every dwelling they passed ; and, strange to say, even the merry Nicholas seemed deaf to the repeated “quips and cranks” of his lord ; now gazing with unwonted earnestness upon some such venerable Israelite as we have pourtrayed, and now glancing at Cœur d’Acier, with an expression of rather perplexed than jocular interest.

The High-street at length received them, alive with mirth and minstrelsy—gay vestures—busy footsteps—clamorous voices—the press of entering cavalcades, and of the admiring mob, who thronged to the very hoofs and housings of the steeds. In short, crowded, echoing and glittering with all the “pomp, pride and circumstance” which may be supposed, at such a time, to invest not only the heart, but the outward limbs and flourishes of a great city.

“And here,” said Raymond, turning his horse’s head towards the left, as Du Coci-deew bridle in the opposite direction, (towards the castle, in fact)—

"And here," continued the latter, taking up the word, "we part—why, it was our compact; fare thee well, dear Raymond! since it must needs be thus—but," he added, delaying to extend the parting hand—"whither away at night-fall? Wilt thou not to the castle, and pray the Marshal for meet lodging?"

"No," answered the youth. "To the *Newan Mynstre* I, there shall a holy clerk spice me such a flagon for my rere-supper as shall scarce pleasure your palate this night, although ye feast it under the purple *dais* at the right hand of King William."

"Better thy jolly clerk than thy Jewish wizard," said the knight smiling; "but what more will the love of thy fat shaveling do for thee?"

"Purvey me a fresh steed for my lord's love; and, thereupon, good Sir Knight, tell me the name of him to whom I may then return this borrowed prancer at the castle stables?"

"To *him of the broken lance*," was the reply; "if thou must needs be so precise."

"Aye, but the name"—objected Raymond.

"*He of the broken lance*," again replied the adventurer; "other name have I none for thy ear, gentle youth, until it be sounded there by

other lips than mine ; and *then*—forget not that thou hast plighted me thy friendship—forget not—” he added, laying his hand on Raymond’s—“ who, in the evil hour, will be true witness for thee before King William, in the matter of De Waleric’s death, when mine own madpate Nicholas cut thee from bondage !”

“ I hold me honoured in your love, brave Knight,” said the youth, “ and shame were it did I forget who, of all yon knightly band, had alone the knightly spirit to cry shame upon a calumny so base !”

“ Why then,” rejoined Sir Alberic, grasping his hand, “ our Lady’s blessing and farewell !” and with these words he rode off; his squire adding, as he followed,—

“ A brief farewell hast thou from me, fair sir, for, by my patron St. Nicholas ! I will see thee ere another sun-set, at the mansion of thy bearded sorcerer.” He turned, and they were presently lost amidst the crowds of the festal street.

Between spirits of a certain order—frank, generous, and unsuspecting, there is a sort of occult power of communication—a conventional language—*felt*, not *spoken*—an intuitive

freemasonry, by which, in a single interview, they divine at once their mutual fitness and adaptation to the sacred purposes of friendship. It was thus that a feeling of active kindness had sprung up between Raymond and Du Cœci, and that they parted with a cordiality which is not often the fruit of much longer intimacy. There was, besides, on the part of the former, that irresistible prepossession in favour of one—the only one, who, while all around are scowling dislike, or smiling suspicion, has the manliness and the moral courage to avow his solitary sense of the general injustice.

- Cœurd'Acier was now alone in the vast and crowded capital, and after long seclusion in the wilds of Northumberland, well might he linger for some moments in admiration upon the spot where he was thus left. A far different aspect did “the white City” then present from that which it now wears in the eye of a traveller. Its suburbs stretched on every side about a mile beyond their present extent; to Worthy and to Week upon the north and west, and, upon the opposite points, to St. Cross and St. Magdalen’s Hill. The towers and spires of almost innumerable parish churches,

and fair daughters ; the latter stealing from under their wimples an occasional side glance at the youthful cavaliers whose chargers pranced and caracoled beside them ; repaid, probably, by no modest gaze from those courtly youths, as the lowering brow and bitten lip of Gaffer Citizen would frequently evince. *Here*, upon some temporary elevation, a minstrel touched his harp to interminable lays of love and battle—*there*, a jestour, or mere verbal narrator of like themes, toiled his invention and recollection to amuse a circle of grey-bearded old listeners. In short, men, women, and children, of all ranks and ages, laughed and jested, and sang and shouted ; dogs howled and barked—steeds neighed and pranced and plunged—hawks screamed, and shook their jesses and plumes—bells rang, and nakers resounded—grooms, armourers, and coistrils* quarrelled and swore—pilgrims and pardoners vended especial relics and dispensations—jolly abbots in full *pontificalibus* peeped at fair dames from under their mitres ; and, in full contrast, half-starved mendicant friars plied their vocation of beggary for our Lady's love, with huge bags upon their shoulders, and gourds at their left sides.

* Coistril, or custrel (Fr. *Coustillier*), a Buckler-bearer.

In spite, however, of all surrounding novelties, Raymond soon felt the necessity of collecting and arranging his thoughts, so as to act upon them with vigour and promptitude under approaching difficulties. The Invisible of the forest, it may be remembered, bade him “begone upon his lord’s mission and his own.” The stage was now before him upon which *both* were to be performed, and, to both, without the tediousness of other explanation, we shall endeavour to give a merely incidental development.

His first step was to return along the Jewry, to meet the person whom, at the commencement of this chapter, we described as loitering under the northern gateway, attired in a light military riding dress. But, before retracing half the length of the street, Raymond saw, approaching him at a deliberate pace, the other and older individuals mentioned, at the same time, as holding converse within the portal-gloom.

While yet at a little distance, Cœur d’Acier observed that the strangers paused for a moment opposite one of the Jewish mansions, which he himself had regarded, in passing, with an expression of doubtful or puzzled remembrance,—it was perhaps the largest and

most gloomy in the whole opprobrious street. They seemed about to cross over, as if for admission, but the approach of Raymond broke as it were upon their purpose, and, resuming an onward pace, the parties came full in front of De Mowbray's trusted squire.

There was something about the appearance of these men which it was impossible to regard with indifference; something which awoke curiosity, and riveted attention. The eldest was probably about forty-five—a tall spare man, with dark hair—pallid complexion—thin irritable lips—a broad, but not very elevated forehead, and eyes which seemed to pierce through and through the object they fell upon.

His companion, who might be eight or ten years younger, was almost the very reverse of this—a little deficient in stature, and somewhat inclined to corpulence, his figure might have been termed *clumsy*, had not a free and firm step, a gait and demeanour almost approaching to nobleness, and occasional gestures of fiery quickness, intimating habits of action and exercise, fully redeemed it from such an imputation. The general expression of his countenance was bold, frank, reckless

and determined ; singular physiognomy for a chaffering son of trade, with its bargain-making tact and smooth conciliating obsequiousness. His hair was sedulously hidden by a large woollen cap, but a complexion singularly florid was as strangely belied by dark whiskers and moustaches. A keen and leisurely observer might have detected a strong reddish tinge in the eye-brows ; and the eyes themselves would have struck him as the most remarkable features of a remarkable face ; large and quick and fiery, but one of a totally different colour from its fellow, and oddly marked with spots of a dusky red.

All this, perhaps, does not do justice to the “something” which we have spoken of as “awakening curiosity and riveting attention ;” but *Raymond’s* impression will at least be tolerably conveyed by the fact that mere curiosity determined him upon addressing these individuals. He saluted them with greater courtesy than military gallants ordinarily cared to waste upon buyers and sellers, and requested simply to learn if the king had yet made his *entrée* into Winchester ?

The youngest, to whom he had more particularly addressed himself, instead of reply-

ing, turned full upon his companion, as if actually looking in his saturnine visage for an answer to a query so simple. Nor was the person thus appealed to a jot more frank or direct. He fixed a keen gaze upon the querist, and, after a pause of some seconds, replied only by an interrogation equally abrupt and irrelevant—

“And what wouldest thou with the Majesty of England?”

Now, from the man of broad-cloth to the man of plate and mail, this was, in the language of the day, “*outrecuidance*

“I will make answer for thee, good youth,” said a facetious gentleman, whose pie-bald vest, and cap and bells and bauble, told his vocation. Then perking his sharp impudent visage, with a grimacing leer, full in that of the merchant, he added,—

“An’ it like your wool-mongering worships, the poor varlet would crave a *monopoly* from Nuncle King—a monopoly to traffic in BRASS—(saving your presence!) see ye not that his

visage is an everlasting *sample* and stock-in-trade to boot?"

This very indifferent sally at the expense of our squire was rewarded, nevertheless, with shouts of laughter from a bevy of idlers, who dogged the heels of the jester to pick up the dropped crumbs of his facetiousness.

"Good friend in motley," said Raymond, "thou art a fool indeed—to crack jests which may procure thee a cracked crown."

"By my bells, sir," said the man of wit, "to be a fool indeed I must needs copy my betters—both wise men and great men—I must not let my *crown* stand in the way of my jest!"

The merchants instantly moved away.

"Fall back, my masters!" said Raymond to the crowd, peremptorily, although half-laughing—"these greasy city knaves know not to be civil, save only when zechins and bezants are ringing upon their counters."

"Never too late to learn!" said a grim soldierly-looking fellow in the throng,—"let them taste of thy riding-rod, sir squire! lay on and spare not!"

"Aye, by Gog's bones!" shouted another, "anoint me the chaffering knaves with oil of hazel!"

"Only he that hath the lank body and the white visage," cried the jester—"only he!"

"Aye, knave!" said the person thus pleasantly singled out, observing that the mob followed as if in joyful expectation of seeing him drubbed to his heart's content, "and wherefore *I* alone, ha?"

"Because," replied the significant humourist, "thy fat friend there needs it not—he hath been already too often anointed—*once* at least that *I* wot of!"—

To this, neither of the men of commerce, fat or lean, returned word or look, but crossed immediately to the Jew's door; and Raymond, scattering a few small coins amongst the crowd, was of course permitted to pursue his way as he listed.

Before reaching the gate the object of his peregrinations stood before him.

This was another aspirant for the honours of chivalry under the banner of De Mowbray; his Squire of the chambers, in fact, the next in grade to the Squire of the body.

Torfin Paganel—such was the name of the youth—bore some part in the mission of Cœur d'Acier; but with limited knowledge of its import, and subject to the superior will and

pleasure of his colleague. The effect of this half-confidence, as well as the character upon which it operated, we leave for the present, to the reader's sagacity or patience. They had ridden together from the coast, accompanied by a few trusty and well-armed retainers, until, upon reaching the more populous districts in the vicinity of the Metropolis, it was thought expedient to disperse, and that each should singly pursue his way to the city, lest their recognition by any of the opposite faction might prejudice the secret object of their journey. This precautionary measure was adopted the more suddenly that chance almost threw De Waleric by their very side.—Unseen, however, they saw and knew that unfortunate traveller, rode apart, and met no more until at the north gate of Winchester, as we have described. We may just add here, though, without any further comment, that Raymond had in his individual breast, motives rather for encountering than avoiding De Waleric.

“So, gentle Torfin—first at the trysting-place;” said Raymond, drawing the other within the shadow of a huge carved portal.

"I keep watch here, on the cold foot," returned Paganel—"Patience is known for a good nag, if she be not spur-galled till her lungs crack. But what in the fiend's name, hath delayed thee? what mare's nest hath made thee lag-last of us all?"

"Such a nest," replied his companion, "as I would to God hand of mine had never been thrust into!"

"Aye!" said Torfin—"why, what hath chanced? what says Hugo de Waleric? for I think thou rod'st to instead of from—'Is it peace or war, Jehu?' as clerks have it."

"Peace with De Waleric—and for ever!" said Raymond; "war who else may. He hath been met by the grim champion who breaks every man's lance and buckler."

"Slain!" ejaculated Torfin.

"Slain!" repeated his comrade.

Torfin looked fixedly upon the ground for a few moments, pursing his brows together, and then suddenly looking up, said, "Slain! So... there is ever work for the willing hand... lag-best did I say? cry you mercy, comrade,—busy finger makes tardy foot."

"How mean ye by that?"

"Mean? simply that, by a good blow, timely

stricken (and privily withal) a man may do good service to his betters."

"Why thou born-slave of the evil one!" said Raymond, "dost thou think me as deeply written in the infernal books as thy villainous self? whip me that sneering devil of suspicion out of thee, and know that had Hugo de St. Waleric been the one only let betwixt De Mowbray and the sole sovereignty of Earth, *I* would not thus have thrust him from my path, although the lifting of a finger had sufficed to do it. Enough, he hath been dealt upon by the Saxon."

"Very like—very like—" answered Paganel, with a smile of no generous meaning—"marry, who but they? stout arm to strike—broad shoulder to bear.—Enough of De Waleric.—But methinks the grace of St. Julian had speedily purveyed ye fresh companionship.—He of the broken lance is a choice gallant."

"Aye," said Raymond, "knowest thou aught of him?"

"I!" replied Torfin, with affected surprise—"nay, it is not I that have been solaced with his worshipful converse — what should I know?"

"What thou *shouldst* know, it matters little—but that thou *dost* know something of yonder knight, which it may import me much to learn, and which, *even for that reason*, thou wouldest withhold from me, the curl of thy lip and the sparkle of thine eye tell me as fairly as though I could gaze into the very hollow of thy breast! Look, Torfin Paganel! thou art my enemy! bitter, though secret—and with *this sole cause*, that it hath pleased our lord to hold me deeper in his counsel and his love than thy all-jealous, far-stretching, and evil-weening self! Tush man! be honest, say thou hatest me—say that, in good time, thou lookest to put thy foot upon my neck, and tread me into ruin! say this, and fling away the outworn mask of civil sneers. Manly, acknowledged hatred were better, a million fold, than thus creeping to a base purpose with felon-like equivocation!"

The accused seemed taken "at unawares."

"If I indeed hate thee —," he began.

"*If?*" repeated Raymond, with a strong emphasis of scorn—"tush! let us speak of other matters—my eye distresses thee. Where be our scattered archers? saw ye ought of *them* while loitering by the gate?"

“Yes—all.—I saw them enter, and mix with the passing crowd.”

“Well—of the Lady Constance? what tidings of *her*? ”

“Safe come—safe lodged,” said Paganel, “mew’d up in cloister, in Nunna Mynstre, by the careful Primate, under whose holy wing she hath journeyed from Normandy. Thus much did I learn of the grey porter; and then, tarrying but to stable my courser, sped to the place of tryst at the north-gate.”

“Peace and away!” said Raymond abruptly, as the van of Montgomery’s cavalcade emerged from the portal. The squires struck immediately into the crowd, and made direct for the Abbey of NEWAN MYNSTRE.

CHAPTER X.

" Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?
Set them before us."

Shakspeare.

" They say, forsooth, we are a 'scattered nation'—
I cannot tell; but we have scrambled up
More wealth by far than they that brag of faith.
There's Kirriah Jairim, the great Jew of Greece,
Obed in Bairseth, Nones in Portugal,
Myself in Malta, some in Italy,
Many in France, and wealthy every one;
I, wealthier far than any Christian—
But who comes here?"—

Marlowe.

RAYMOND dismounted before the gates of *Newan Mynstre*, and, with his sword-hilt, tapped reverently upon a wicket of ponderous strength, but arched so low that not even a dwarf could have passed forth—

" And kept his impious turban on without
Good morrow to the sun"—

After much prefatory withdrawing of bolt and bar and chain, it was opened by the porter—a

thin, spare figure nearly doubled by age and penance—vigil and fast; and with lineaments furrowed in corresponding wise by those destroyers.

To the inquiry whether the great Primate, Anselm of Canterbury, abode in Newan Mynstre, the emaciated official replied in low tones, “I bless God and St. Grimbald that it is even so!—these hands”—(displaying his attenuated digits with a sort of tremulous exultation,) “even these hands set wide the gates of our holy dwelling to admit the chosen one of the Lord!”

“Set wide the wicket, then,” said Cœur d’Acier, “and admit one who hath much to say to that blessed man. Advise thine abbot, Sir Porter, that here is one who craves speech of the Archbishop.”

The porter seemed inclined, however, to take a precisely contrary course; he narrowed the reconnoitering space between the wicket-door and its lintel, until little more was distinguishable than his own thin cheek, sharp nose, and dull cold blinking eye.

“Wert thou brother to the blessed Grimbald himself,” he muttered, “the sainted patron of our house, need is there that I should

gainsay thee in this. The Prelate and our Father Abbot are even now wrestling in prayer for the children of this generation, lest HE that is mighty come with the fan of his wrath and purge the wheat for the garner!"

"Whilst *thou*, Sir Grey-beard," said Torfin Paganel, "art shutting thy churlish wicket in the teeth of the wayfarer, ha?"

The old man looked upon the speaker, and replied somewhat sharply, "Methinks, strippling, I have done fairly by thee, and enough, for one day,—once and again have I dropped bolt and latch at thy restless pleasure, and now, what more wouldst thou? unless it be to humble thee at the altar, and deposit thy gift, and back thy fed courser, and make us quit of thee?"

Motioning silence to his companion, Raymond endeavoured to conciliate the peevish ascetic. "I pray thee, gentle father, tell me but this—came there a lady, noble, youthful and fair, with the holy primate?"

"Trouble me not," replied the porter, with a strange irritability, "I heard her not—I looked not upon her—I drew not a bolt to admit one of the accursed sex! (our Lady pardon me the phrase!) She departed with two

of our lay-brethren to the *Nunna Mynstre*, and there, if thou art so desirous, the eye of thy folly may be gladdened. A fair good eve, and *Benedicite, mez filz!*" concluded the gate-ward, and the wicket would have been shut in their faces, had not Raymond thrust his sword-hilt within the lintel groove.

"Tarry, Sir Porter!" he exclaimed with a stern voice, "and open to me straight, at peril of thy tattered gaberdine! open I say! or by St. Francis! I will proclaim the niggard churlishness of thine house wherever a bead is dropped in Southern Britain! open to the friend of him who is the friend of thine Abbot, and gave to his kinsman Paul the Abbey of St. Albans!"

The disputed gate flew wide. A lay brother took charge of the steed, and the squires were ushered into a chamber of the refectory. That, and a separate cell of the dormitory for each, were assigned as their night-quarters; no hostelry, in those primitive times, affording rest and refreshment to the traveller; and the discharge of all hospitable duties resting solely with the monastic houses.

Raymond soon found that the porter's information was correct. A lady of youthful aspect

and noble bearing had arrived with the Primate, bat, without crossing the threshold of St. Grimbald, had been at once removed to the sister establishment of *Nunna Mynstre*, founded for pious women by Alfred's queen, about the same time that the great king built the “*Newan*,” as a conventional retreat for his favourite chaplain:

That the fair traveller was Constance de Mowbray, the squire had no doubt—but he well knew that it would be in vain to seek an interview without the warrant of Amselin, under whose guardianship she had journeyed from Normandy. At the same time, it was also confirmed that the primate was then in fervent prayer with the Lord Abbot, and that some hours, probably, must elapse before any profane applicant could approach him—rendering it, in fact, almost impossible that access should be obtained to the lady that night.

Something there was, either in the heart or the imagination of Raymond, which suffered eclipse with this temporary delay. He knew not himself why the brief interval of a night, after a day of harassing excitement and toil, should seem to fall upon him so heavily. When Constance de Mowbray and the last

beheld each other, they were little more than children—"passion slumbered in the germ," but in after days, when the Maiden trod the shores of France, and the Youth the wilds of Northumberland, often had the fancy of the latter called up with delighted gaze "a shadow like an angel, with bright hair" streaming over a lovely forehead, and eyes in which the twin spirits of joy and purity laughed for ever; while a hand of matchless beauty seemed waving him on to achievements such as were then deemed to render the humblest neophyte of chivalry worthy even of the daughter of a line of kings. Often and often did it occur to him, how must the incomparably blooming child have expanded into the full loveliness of womanhood! or—more delicious still—was she not upon the confines of that enchanted "neutral ground," where, elevated above the pettier sympathies of the child, the lovely wanderer has yet some brief, delightful journeying-space before entering the thorny and broken path which makes the pilgrimage of suffering—experienced woman!

Yes; with these images he had dallied a thousand times, and now they were indulged with ten-fold vivacity, until their excitement

so fevered him, that it was with difficulty he mastered his disappointment sufficiently to avoid betraying it to those around. But the necessity of struggling with such depression was too obvious, and, painfully diverting his mind to other topics, he reverted to the appointment with the Lady Matilda, by the cathedral at dusk. The rich evening light had, however, still some time to fade ; and to count the slow minutes of the interval in Newar Mynstre, was beyond his philosophy. There was another and a better way.—He drained one cup of wine—left Torfin Paganel to the care of the cellarer, repassed the Abbey portal, and once again made his way to the Jewry.

We have already hinted that the story of *The Jewish Sorcerer*, as related to Du Coci and his squire, was not altogether a fable. But let there be no premature pricking up of the marvel-loving ear ;—Raymond's meaning was figuratively, not literally, expressed. His sorcerer, indeed, wrought many marvels, but all by the sole agency of one omnipotent demon—MAMMON !

“—— the least erected spirit that fell
From Heaven——”

But the most indefatigable in “going to and

fro upon the face of the earth," and the most subservient to his worshippers, of all the powers and principalities of middle air. Even the talisman which Raymond expatiated upon with such fluent enthusiasm, was not entirely a creature of fancy, but a tangible reality, to which we shall, by and bye, give a local habitation and a name.

Nearly seven years had elapsed since the squire last looked upon the mansion in Jewry-street, which he was now desirous of entering. It is, therefore, not surprising that he felt some difficulty in distinguishing it with precision from the adjoining structures. He gazed, indeed, upon that which the discourteous Burgesses had shown some intention of visiting, but as the *front* offered no mark of identity for his recollection, he made a circuit to the rear, that is to say, to where a moderately high wall terminated the back part of the Jewish premises, in what is now called Staple Garden. The space between this enclosure and the houses was divided into cultivated plots, where, however limited the other recreations and enjoyments of the despised proprietors, they might

" Add to them retired leisure
That in trim gardens takes his pleasure."

Many a rich exotic, in those secluded nooks, lavished upon the warm air its oriental fragrance; many a rare herb and wondrous shrub, which, in the estimation of the vulgar —aye, and of the comparatively enlightened too—gathered at the ripe hour and under the fitting lunar auspices, gave to the chemic hand that *expressed* their virtues, a nameless power over the sons of men—benignant or malign, as the spirit of the operator might incline; and, in spite of many cures wrought by Jewish medicaments, it was not generally believed that the herbal or pharmacopeia of the best disposed Israelite contained other than deadly ‘*materia*,’ whether of physical or of occult operation.

Some tall trees which grew just within one of these enclosures, and shot their long arms over the wall, now fixed the attention of Cœur d’Acier. Seating himself upon a large stone beneath the shadow of the overhanging foliage, he looked upward, and said at last in audible tones—“Yes—here, at least, I can scarcely err—this must be indeed the house of Jodesac—I remember me that from this very elm we dropped to the free earth the night of our departure—I and the never-resting Simeon——!”

he paused, as his mind journeyed back to the period he thus recalled, then added—" by St. Mary ! I marvel if that mischief-loving imp be yet hanged for some fair deed—yet more, how I am to present me before his grisly sire—the Rabbi Jodesac—if the spawn of the old serpent came never again to his unbelieving home ——."

A hand was laid upon his shoulder at this moment, and a voice said,—

"I will instruct thee, Raymond."

He started, and beheld Nicholas de L'Epee.

"*Thou here!*!" was his involuntary and not delighted exclamation.

"I—even I—," said the modest Nicholas, "a fair assurance did I give thee that we would indeed visit together the mansion of thy Jewish sorcerer. Now, behold me! up, and enter, Sir Squire of the North! and, again do I say, I will instruct thee how to perk thy visage in the beard of the Rabbi Jodesac, with never a twinge of conscience touching the lost Simeon."

"Why," said the surprised Raymond, "what knowest *thou* of the lost Simeon?"

"That he is *found*," replied De L'Epee, "found, gentle Raymond, where *thou*, me-

thinks, hast lost both eyes and ears. What ! can the lapse of six summers—a shirt of mail and a cap of steel—a Milan brand and a christian oath, so change an ancient comrade that, quick-witted as thou art held, thou yet knowest not Simeon, the son of Jodesac *cum barba*, in Nicholas-with-the-sword, who was baptised Christian ere ever a hair had sprouted upon his chin ! ”

Raymond's surprise at this disclosure of identity, was scarcely greater than at his own sluggishness of perception in not anticipating it ; and yet, so great was the singularity of the thing, that it still struggled against perfect conviction. Proof, however, by the adduction of circumstances, was too clear to be long resisted, and Raymond indeed saw, in Nicholas deL'Epee, the very Simeon upon whose boyish restlessness of temper he had wrought to fly from the paternal roof.

“ Blind as the earthworm ! ” he muttered to himself, and then looked as if confounded upon the sudden apparition of his converted friend, sprung from idle boyhood to the vigour of the full grown man ; and, upon his expanded limbs, the array of chivalry, instead of the despised garments of Judaism.

They who, after the separation and half-forgetfulness of years, are thus suddenly thrown together by the shock of accident, feel literally astounded by the collision, and it requires the lapse of some tranquillizing minutes before the first of a thousand questions finds its way to the lip. At length, however, each rapidly sketched his prevailing fortunes since the hour of separation. Raymond had simply to state that the body of military upon which they had stumbled the day after their flight from Winchester, and in which he himself was cheerfully enrolled, while the less prepossessing Simeon met only with repulse and ridicule, was, in fact, the rear of De Mowbray's force, retreating in no little confusion from the siege of Ilchester, when the gallant De Waleric defended that city against the Northern Earl and his rebellious kinsman, Geoffrey, "the rough-handed Bishop of Coutance," as Du Coci had justly termed him.

"When set before De Mowbray," continued Raymond, "he looked upon me with a kindly eye—made me his page—and, in due time his Squire of the board—then of the chambers—then of the body. I have been bold and wary—trusted and fortunate—worn my locks loose

and my thoughts close.—Have grown into the saddle for my lord's service, and now, behold me, with but another step to buckle a gilt spur upon my heel."

"A blythe tale, and fairly told," said De L'Epée ; " and I, too, have kept saddle and stirrup against fate and fortune, albeit my despised gaberdine was not exchanged for an Earl's livery. When De Mowbray's spearmen had ye fairly in clutch, and drove me whither I would, with the blessing of the foul fiend for my exchequer ; I betook me to the very road we have journeyed to-day, and, thereupon, encountered me a wounded knight, who, by our Lady's love-locks ! looked little better than so much worshipful carrion ; so sunken-eyed, and ghastly-visaged, and fleshless upon rib and thigh-bone. Marry, sir, he had been hotly met, a brief space before, by one whose deadly lance had well-nigh sent him headlong to the fiery bosom of St. Nicholas. The sick and discomfited champion lay in a horse-litter, when I drew near ; and, thereupon, bethinking me that Gaffer Death is like Cavaliero Anger, and Lady Love, always pitifully athirst, I clapped me to his parched lips that flasket of rare cordial which thou and I had so well bus-

banded. A thankful man was Barebones, and faltered forth a promise of guerdon and favour, if the hand that so ministered to him would yet tend upon his sick journeying, until the gentler air of France blew healing into his ghastly frame again. Marry, sir, better I could not do. We reached Dover in sorry plight—sped over the seas like cross-bow-bolts—and then, with fair tendance and leech-craft, and our Lady's blessing, Sir Skeleton grew in flesh, and strengthened in sinew—doffed the sick robe for the steel harness—climbed once more into the war-saddle, and changing his old device for that of the broken lance, fought stoutly in many a fair field, under the banner of King Philip. Truly, friend Raymond, it behoved me, with all diligence, to learn the sharp mystery of cut and thrust, and how to rein a good nag amidst cleaving of helmets, and breaking of spears. It was no babes play with us for many a month! at last, however, came peace, when the sport was at the highest; and, work being at lack abroad, hither come we this blessed day, with light hearts and purses to seek fairer fortunes at home."

"And verily!" exclaimed his friend, "ye

will find it scantily better than reaping in a gleaned field. But how name ye your Lord, I pray you? this gallant of the broken lance?"

"Softly—" replied Nicholas—"we will discourse of that anon. What makes thee in Winchester, good Raymond? and what wouldest thou in the den of the lion?" (pointing to the house) "for truly, it may prove nothing better to either thee or me, if the passions of my grim father, the Rabbi, have not moulted many a feather since, through the branches of this very elm, we fled by moon-gleam from the Jewry, with never a God-speed-you at parting."

"I would regain my *Talisman*," replied the squire of De Mowbray. "Nay, there is no dream in this—the treasure-chamber of thy father contains, or once contained, a poniard—a *Misericorde*, tempered in the blade as never else was steel hammered upon mortal anvil, and jewelled in the hilt to the worth of a king's ransom.—Marry, it was a king's gift to one who——" he paused in some emotion, then added—"but that recks not—Enough—it was deposited for my future claim, in the safe keeping of Jodesac, by the hapless De Waleric, my sometime guardian, the very

night when his generous hand unbarred the secret postern in the walls of Ilchester, to give thy captive father his liberty."

"Aye, truly," said Nicholas, with a sarcastic grin—"that, in return, the liberated Jew might serve De Waleric by taking charge of *thy* tender body, and guiding thee safe to Winchester, when De Mowbray and Bishop Geoffrey were like to break with fire and sword into Ilchester; else had my captive father languished in a dungeon, until the vermin that crawled upon its floor had picked his eyes out."

"Let him thank me," retorted Raymond, "that was the blessed cause to help him forth—mine own, at least, he must refund—for, in a coming pinch, it will import me much to grasp that poniard."

"Up, and be doing, then," said Nicholas, "knock, and enter—ask, and have."

"Tush," replied the northern squire; "knock and be knocked were the likelier tale—it is for *thee*, by thine own promise, to teach me to take the lion by the beard—!"

"It was a proper boast," replied the son of Jodesac, seating himself upon the turf very coolly and leisurely. "How, think ye, am I

to charm mine own body against claw and task?"

"Resolve then for thyself," said Raymond, "I may dally no longer—what wilt thou that I report of thee to the rabbi?"

"Not that I am turned *pork-eater*, or, by the sow of St. Antony, the husks of the prodigal's swine-trough were a better windfall than my paternal inheritance. I might sell my birthright profitably for less than a mess of pottage. Rememberest thou, gentle squire of the north," added the 'covertite,' after a moment's consideration, "by what fox-earths and badger-holes and blind alleys, thou and I departed from this mansion of my fathers?"

"It is wisely asked," said Raymond, "remembering that, from thine own chamber until we stood even here, beneath this garden wall, my head was buried in the folds of a cloak. Thou hadst, at least, the grace to take that measure for the safe-keeping of thy father's treasure-chests."

"Well," resumed Nicholas, "saying that, even now, out of my pure love, I cared to guide thee once more through that dark labyrinth—wouldest thou consent to journey it in the same blindfold plight? Look, gentle Raymond, thy

"word of secresy were as a thousand oaths to me, but the secret of this hidden passage is none of mine—I may not chuck it into the hand of another, though it were the mailed palm of St. George himself!"

"Nay," said Raymond, smiling, "bandage my eyes with a thousand ells if thou wilt, so that they be unmuffled when the voice of Jodesac is in my ear."

"Up then, upon thy blind venture!" said his comrade, pointing to the elm,—"quick as the bat, and silent as the mole!"

Raymond followed, at once, the suggestion and example of his companion—availed himself of the over-shooting elm-branches, and in an instant stood at the *inner-foot* of the garden wall. Their landing place was a secluded and shadowy spot, from which nothing of the house and little of the garden itself was distinguishable; while, of course, it enjoyed equal security from the windows of the first and the open walks of the latter. It was a sort of irregular alley, twisting its dark way through clustering flowers and plants, and shrubs of surprising height and beauty. *Cœur d'Acier*, however, had little leisure to study the *locale* of his former escape and present adventure. He was

instantly blindfolded with his riding-cloak, and led on, thus darkened, through heaven knows what floral and verdant tortuosities, until a whisper from his guide suggested that their further course lay through the bowels—and not upon the surface—of the earth. They descended a flight of some twelve or fourteen steps of stone, from the last of which a narrow passage struck off at an acute angle. This, also, was explored in perfect silence, and, at its termination, Raymond was relieved from his almost suffocating envelope. The unbandaged eyes, however, were no gainers by the removal—all was profound darkness—all, too, was silence as profound, until, after a moment's earnest listening, the visitor fancied he caught the sound of voices, but so deadened, either by distance or some intervening substance, as to be scarcely distinguishable.

“Now,” whispered De L’Epée, “quick ear and sharpened ken! but not a breath or a foot-fall for the love of our Lady!”

A faint gleam of light became then perceptible, and slowly and gradually widened, as the hand of Nicholas, with gentle care, drew open a door of solid iron, which turned upon its oiled and polished hinges without the

slightest imaginable sound. A voice was then heard in distinct enunciation, and, immediately after, another — harsher — louder — and more impatient. The mute listeners stepped warily into the space from which the gleams and voices issued, and Raymond then perceived that it formed a sort of gallery, enclosing two sides of a small, square, stone-built apartment, into which they could look down through the folds of the dark tapestry which hid from the eye beneath every symptom of such a vantage-ground for espial and eaves-dropping.

The scene thus strangely presented, was in itself, equally strange. Not a ray of the blessed sun found access to the vault-like chamber; but, from its groined roof of massive stone-work, a shapeless iron cresset hung by an iron chain of like primitive workmanship, and threw upon all around, a red, and smoky, and preternatural radiance. Every one who has exchanged the pure light of a summer's eve for the lustre even of some brilliant haunt of pleasure, will confess that the substitution appeared garish and unnatural; but when the transition is to such a lurid glare, amidst such sepulchral nakedness, the revulsion must be conceived tenfold. The impure beams, however, illumi-

mated the forms and features of three men, of whom the most attractive at once, and commanding, was the Rabbi JODESAC himself.

This remarkable man, well known over the southern parts of England as the richest money-changer of his day, stood behind a stone desk or counter, equally rude to the eye and comfortless to the touch, with the walls, floor and ceiling of the apartment. It was based upon a broad slab of about a foot in height, and this, perhaps, tended to advantage in some degree the figure of the master, as he alternately bent forward to address his visitors, and drew himself up at certain points in their discourse. But no adventitious circumstances were wanting to invest with dignity a form upon which nature had already conferred it with a liberal hand. The burden of about seventy years took not one inch of its erect altitude from the tall, spare-built, but majestic figure of the Rabbi; and the distinctive garments of his tribe hung upon him with the oriental grace that a great painter would throw around a Daniel, or an Isaiah, in the sublime moments of prophetic denunciation. Age, indeed, and perhaps the restless ploughshare of thought, had furrowed his countenance with

deep lines; and a beard of snowy whiteness, which descended with patriarchal grace to his very girdle, deepened the general aspect of "hoar antiquity;" although, in startling opposition to the latter, there fell, from either side of the upper lip, a long moustache of almost raven blackness. In the large dark eye, and upon the pale flexible lip, there was that, also, which spoke of fiery energies, rebellious to the assuaging hand of time; slumbering, indeed, but, like the tiger in his lair, to be startled into fury by the whisper of a breeze, or the echo of a foot-fall.

Such was, or appeared, the Rabbi Jodesac. But how was the curiosity of Raymond excited, when in the Jew's companions, or visitors, he saw the very individuals who had replied to him so much to the amusement of the street mob. Seats were behind them, but either they had not availed themselves of such accommodation, or quitted them in the eagerness of discourse, to confront, upon more equal terms, the object of their visit, in his graceful garb, and imposing attitude. The first words which the squires caught distinctly, were from the latter, and in the following strain.

"Tell not me—tell not me—monies are not

to be gathered as the dust, nor the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brook. It is a huge sum ; a huge and an unheard of sum that ye require. How, think ye, or when, or where, is such a mighty treasure to be looked upon ?"

The elder and taller merchant was now, as heretofore, the spokesman for both. His tone was cold and sarcastic, and without the least savour of that conciliation which is generally held a prime essential in a borrower. He advanced a step or two, and, putting his forefinger upon the desk, said,

"I will expound unto thee. It is to be looked upon even in this chamber—upon this counter—whensoever it is thy pleasure, good Jodesac, to feast our earthly eyes with such heavenly glitter; and, trust me, the sooner thy hidden shekels are displayed, the better shall it be for thy usurious self."

"Dost thou threaten me, Sir Merchant?" exclaimed the Rabbi, drawing up his form to its full, commanding height—"dost thou indeed think to part hence laden with treasure for thy proud bearing, and haughty speech?"

"Even so," answered the merchant, with a most withering smile—"and by the blessed symbol which is the abhorrence of thee and

thine, if thou wilt not listen to *reason*, I promise thee thou shalt listen to that which were a thousand-fold more splitting and terrible to thy unbelieving ear."

"Now, by our holy father Abraham!" cried the unintimidated Jew, "thou art the most frontless braggart that ever mine old eyes beheld, even in this groaning land of slaves and tyrants! Look, Nazarene!" (and he shook his attenuated and bloodless finger in the very face of his visitor)—"couldst thou exchange thy garb of traffic for harness of linked mail; and thy base station for a baron's rank—I would not quail to thee in this, nor speak thee fair—nor promise thee a shekel—no! not one poor bezant to thy worst threats, though thou hadst journeyed hither from the right hand of King William, compassed about with pride as with a chain, and covered with violence as with a garment!"

The person to whom this was addressed, displayed no other symptom of emotion than a momentary paleness of cheek, and a slight curl of the lip; but his companion, the junior citizen, who had hitherto remained silent, now burst into a laugh so loud and harsh and dissonant, that the ribbed roof of the chamber

rang again with its unnatural mirth ! and even the highly-excited Jew himself, was, for a moment, startled into an expression of surprise.

"Call ye this bargain-making ? Brother mine ?" said the deep but unmelodious voice of the laugher, as he advanced towards the desk, and put aside his friend—"give place, I pray you ; it may be that I can better expound the law unto this learned man."

"Nay—I do beseech you," returned the elder, with singular earnestness, "leave me yet to amend mine own tangled gear—to bind together this broken matter. And thou, good Rabbi, wrath not thy apprehensive spirit for an idle word, when a blessed bargain lies within beard's length of thy clutch ! Wherefore should there be strife betwixt us ? Thou art wise, Jodesac, in the world's thought, after the fashion of the world,—bethink thee then, is it for thee to wrestle stubbornly with those who are but dealing with thee at the bidding and for the vantage of others—of others who, for aught thou knowest, may be, indeed, from the right hand of King William ? rude factors to chaffer with over an empty coffer ! fierce bargain-drivers, an' if thou

puttest them to traffic with thee at their own hand ! fire and steel, good Rabbi, were the gentlest of their interpreters ! the rather that the King is no favourer of thy scattered race like the mighty one his father."

" Fill not thy bowels with the east wind, good merchant !" said Jodesac, with undiminished dignity of tone and gesture, " I know that this is a generation whose teeth are as swords, and whose jaw-teeth are as knives ; but, in the voice of their fury there cometh no terror to him that looketh on high ! behold Galilean ! I am old—and feeble—and childless : wherefore should violence lift itself up into a rod of wickedness to break a leaf driven to and fro ? It hath indeed been said that the ransom of a man's life is his riches ; but, dreamest thou that, with one trembling foot already in the sepulchre of my fathers, I should yet fear to look upon death as upon a bear robbed of its whelps ? that, at the threatening of the devouring Gentile, I should pour into *his* lap the riches of mine increase wherewith the God of our fathers hath blessed me ? No ! as my soul liveth, Nazarene ! there is no dread of death within me ! So near unto their close are the days of my pilgrimage,

that, behold ! like unto the Leviathan of the Prophet, my spirit lifteth itself up against the mighty ! it esteemeth iron as rotten wood, and brass as the dry stubble, and laugheth at the spear and the sword ! ”

“ Now, by St. Luke’s face ! ” exclaimed the junior visitant, in a tone either of sudden anger or high admiration—but whatever was about to follow, his companion eagerly interrupted him as before—

“ I do beseech you, peace ! peace, yet again for our Lady’s sake.”

“ Thy terms—thy terms ! good merchant ! ” cried the Jew, with an impatient movement of the hand—“ Break me not in pieces with words, but, if thou wouldest have monies, answer unto me, and say, upon what grounds, and for what profits shall I essay to gather unto thee the mighty sum which the lust of thy covetousness crieth aloud for ? ”

“ Nay,” answered the borrower, “ I will deal generously with thee, thou man of shekels. Look ! I have learned that, after the fashion of thy patriarchal forefathers in the olden time, thou art, even in these troubled days, a mighty husbandman ; a tiller of the earth for its fruits and grains—a feeder of many flocks,

and a vender of the rich fleeces thereof to those who traffic in woollens. How sayst thou, then, to a grant of goodly land for the loan of these foolish monies we talk of?"

"What *manner* of land, I pray you?" questioned the Rabbi—"tell me *that*, good merchant; and the breadth thereof? and where lieth it? and in what plight for him that would have speedy reaping thereon? *land*, saidst thou, Sir Burgess? so help me, our father Abraham! as the land of this groaning realm is everywhere becoming naught, by reason of the moneyage, and the talliages, and the escutage, and other such cursed imposts as are now eating into the bowels of the husbandman, until the sickle falleth from his hand for very famine, and, for lack of the bread of life, the plough stoppeth in mid-furrow."

"Pish!" said the merchant, "physic not thyself for other men's ails. What be the clowns to thee? or thou to them? Leave Kings and their Justiciaries to play the leeck with such; and take this with thee, Rabbi, if thou be speedy-handed with the monies, and farmest the land we talk of, there shall come no *talliage* or *moneyage* thy way. Beard of

Aaron ! Jodesac, thou wottest little how rare a bargain is offered thee ! many a fair oxgang of meadow-land and arable—many a goodly caracute of wood-pasture and osier-ground, sokemen—villeins and borders—mills and salt pits and churches—and——ah ! *Mater Cæli*,” (turning up his eyes with a very hypocritical assumption of shocked piety,) “a dismal shriving time will there come for thus flinging into the hands of the infidel so goodly a heritage ! ”

Hackneyed in all the arts of bargaining, the Jew smiled derisively at being thus treated like a tyro.

“Hath not,” he replied, “the wisdom of Solomon thus written, ‘It is naught—it is naught, saith the buyer, but when he goeth away then he boasteth?’ Who, I pray you, hath been lord of this heritage heretofore? and where lieth it ?”

“Oh thou of many scruples,” said the merchant, “it is part and parcel of that which was once the broad Earldom of Essex—the same, if thou must needs be so enlightened, which seven, or, it may be, eight winters agone, Hugo de St. Waleric held for his then Lord Paravail—De Mandeville, the vanished Earl.

If thou hadst ever bargaining matter with one or other, perchance thy broker-like remembrance will recall what manner of land is open to thy husbandry for this petty price."

There was something in these last words which struck the listening Raymond so forcibly, that all his self-command, assisted by an admonitory grasp from De L'Epée, scarcely enabled him to repress an audible exclamation. The dialogue, however, which (from whatever cause) had thus excited him, drew rapidly to a close.

"I do remember me those lands," said Jodesac, "and their proud Lord De Mandeville, and his fierce steward De Waleric — men of war from their youth upward ; that, like unto Zebulon and Napthali, jeopardized their lives unto the death in the high places of the field. Aye, and I did furnish monies for Earl Mandeville, even a little space before he fled afar off, no man wist whither. Go to, Sir Merchants, ye have well said that, in this matter, ye are bargainers for other and mightier men. What ! do I not know that De Waleric held this inheritance but for a season, while there was yet hope that his great Paravail would return, and do again the homage demanded by

the vain glory of princes from their vassals ? Do I not know that, after that, the hand of a mightier one, even of him who sitteth upon the throne, found the riches thereof, as a nest ? Now, therefore, answer and declare unto me, unto which of his captains of hundreds, or captains of thousands, hath he since given those goodly oxgangs and fair caracutes ? ”

“ Why, what is that to thee, old man ? mar not thy sleep for that—wilt thou purvey the monies—aye or no ? If ‘ aye,’ hence to thy treasure-chests, and doubt not but we will return to thee anon with parchments y’written full clerkly, and with such seal appended as shall delight thine eyes to look upon. How sayest thou ? ”

“ It is a huge sum,” murmured the Jew, entrenching himself once more in his first position.

“ But which,” replied the borrower, “ thou art, nevertheless, willing to *double*, if need be, ha ? Why, we will not tempt thee—it shall be even the petty handful we have prated of—and when wilt thou, old man, that we return for our poor loan ? ”

“ Holy Fathers ! ” exclaimed the Rabbi,

“how greedy of lucre be these Christians!—go to—go to—it may be that to-morrow—even about this hour——.”

“Ah! thou sayest well—thou sayest well, Jodesac, to-morrow at this hour we will be with thee, although flood and fire were in the path, and pestilence kept the gate!”

And, thus saying, the tall merchant complied with the impatient gesture of his companion, who, for some minutes past, had given “note of preparation” to depart. The Rabbi dismissed his visitants by a low door of well hammered iron, as they passed which, the junior merchant paused for an instant, and, looking Jodesac sternly in the face, exclaimed,

“Fail not in this matter of the shekels, Jew! or by the mother of God! thou hadst best look to thyself and beware of thy heathen scalp!”

They disappeared in the passage-gloom; The host following and closing the door behind him.

“Now,” said Nicholas de l’Epee, “call ye this worth listening to? How think ye of my sire? Is he not in very deed a Sorcerer? Why, I am like to hold a goodly heritage in

Essex some blessed day to come ! marry, by sheepskin, though, instead of lance and stirrup—."

"By *neither*," said his companion, "if there be truth in heaven, or courage upon earth ! Live upon other food than the hope of one caracute of those lands in Essex ! *that* do I counsel thee, good Nicholas, as thou wouldest live and thrive. But what now ? and whither wilt thou guide me next ?"

"Never a foot beyond this gallery," said Nicholas, "save to the very spot from whence we came into it under the garden wall. Mark, we will tarry here whilst thou canst count twice fifty, and, credit me, within that space, either the Rabbi will return to muse over his night's work, or thou wilt hear the shooting of bar and bolt on the far side of yonder door, and see the last glimmer of yonder lamp."

Even as Nicholas ceased speaking, they heard the sounds of bolt and bar shot into their respective sockets, with deliberate heedfulness. In another instant, the cresset seemed self-extinguished, for, without visible agency, it expired, and all was profound darkness.

"Even so," said the son of Jodesac. "Nevertheless, friend Raymond, I must commend

your head to a fold or two of broad woollen, whilst we return. If thou wouldest behold the conclusion of this treaty with the merchants, speed hither at the appointed hour to-morrow eve, and meet me at the garden wall."

Raymond submitted to his envelope as before, and was conducted along the secret passage, until the freshness of the open air, laden with garden sweets, once more saluted him. The bandage was then removed. They clambered in silence over the wall, hurried into the High-street, and, with an agreement to meet the following evening, as already premised, betook them to their several destinations : Nicholas to his lord's lodgings at the castle, and Raymond to the EALDEN MYNSTRE, where the rapidly approaching dusk gave him promise of soon meeting the Lady Matilda.

CHAPTER XI.

"But then she had a devil of a spirit !

* * * *

Making a woman like a porcupine,
Not to be rashly touch'd——."

Lord Byron.

"Choler and Cupid are two fiery things."

Ben Jonson.

MOMENTARILY broader and deeper fell the shadows of coming night, as Raymond stepped into the yet murkier gloom cast far along by the huge walls and towers of Newan and Ealden Mynstres—vast and magnificent structures both, and, strange to say, built so close together that, notwithstanding the intervention of cloisters and other offices, the organs and voices of their respective choirs, gave mutual disturbance to each other.

The squire walked heedfully around the

mighty EALDEN, to satisfy himself that he was (in the phrase of the *duello*,) “first upon the ground,” and, having ascertained this, felt a relief in securing even a brief interval to “smooth the raven down” of his dark thoughts, after the conference he had just heard, and to collect them for the approaching interview with Matilda.

The hour and the scene were alike fitted for such a purpose; or even to pour upon a spirit more excited than Raymond’s, that feeling of almost religious repose and serenity of which it can neither express the fulness nor define the cause. Raymond gradually felt this “inexplicable stillness” deepening within him, and gazed with fervent admiration upon the towers reared by the munificent Bishop Walkelin. Years before, he had beheld them deformed with scaffolding and incompleteness; they stood now in finished grace and majesty, and shewed darkly relieved against the profound blue of the calm night-heaven. Nor did the voice of the festive city break with one discordant note upon the tranquillity of the monastic scene. The gates were closed, the streets silent and deserted. The admonitory curfew had sent its iron warning around, and wherever

lamp gleamed, or faggot blazed, the despotism of that solemn knell was confessed by instantaneous extinction. Not a taper gleamed either in the Cathedral or in Newan Mynstre. The *Compline*, or last religious rite of the day, had been performed in both, and gloom and stillness reigned undisturbed in those vast monasteries. The moon had not yet risen, but, as the purple of heaven deepened, star after star, of gentler beam and more remote orbit, twinkled into meek and silvery lustre; looking down, as with an eye of seraph sweetness, upon the slumber of the hushed and shadowy earth.

“ All—all was silent, save the sounds which make
Silence more awful, as they faintly break ;
The frightened bat’s low shriek—the beetle’s hum—
With nameless sounds—we know not whence they come.”

Raymond alternately stood to drink in the chastening and composing influences flowing from all around, and paced to and fro, in the gloom; as the intensity of thought or the chill of the night breeze, alternately, prompted to repose or motion. At length, a form was distinguishable in the dim star-light, approaching with slow steps. He advanced towards it. They met and passed. Almost instantly, however, both turned, and again

encountered, mutually pausing when within a few paces of each other. The stranger was wrapped from head to foot in the gown and hood of a pilgrim or devotee, but Raymond doubted not that the object of his watch stood before him ; and after a moment's silence, a voice, which fully confirmed him, said in restrained tones,

“ Who walks the silent earth under the darkened heavens ?”

He understood the challenge, and gave the appropriate answer—

“ He to whom a voice whispered in the woodland—‘ night comes to make them such.’ ”

“ The same, too, methinks,” continued the lady, “ whose folly in the woodland hath made his walk in the city safer under the night-cloud than the day-beam. Is it not so ?

“ Folly ?” repeated the squire ; “ wherein noble lady ?”

“ Wherein !” echoed Matilda, “ if the fiery-fit be yet over, how think ye of your fierce bearing to my kinsman Lupus ?”

“ As of a cry, or sob, wrung from even the lips of the bravest by tortures infinite. I was goaded into that which ye have well termed the ‘ fiery fit,’ by suspicion too monstrous for

sought but ruffian infamy—fit only to blacken a common stabber. Suspicion *here* betrayed by a dark question—*there* suggested by a sullen glance—lurking in bitter smiles, or lowering upon revengeful brows; avowed by the fierce words of *one*, and echoed by the exclamations of all!"

"Pity!" replied the lady, in her accustomed tone of sarcasm, "pity, the breath of human doubt should for one moment sully *thy* virgin-spotlessness of name! true, the bravest and the best, the noblest and the wisest, must needs plunge through the slough of the world's thought, but *thine* is to be a *winged* course, dazzling and unbesmirched, or if not thus, all earth must ring with the loud-voiced innocence of the immaculate Raymond!"

"There is truth, Lady," replied the squire, commanding his temper, "even in the taunting bitterness of your gibe; well were it for Chivalry if even her humblest son had rather meet the blast of destruction than infamy's lightest breath. But were it needful, or did occasion and the hour permit, that I should yet further defend the bearing you arraign, *another* and a *better* cause could I assign; it was a fitting meed for broken friendship and

dishonoured faith. Knew ye nothing, lady, of an alliance betwixt De Mowbray and Earl Lupus? how fairly kept by my good lord? how scorned, neglected, broken by your kinsman? Where was the faith of Hugo Lupus when his insulted ally in vain awaited his promised presence in York? How were the remonstrances of De Mowbray answered? with what assurance have his messengers returned? In yonder forest, Lady, the honour of De Mowbray lay in *my* poor hands; *his* counsel was in my breast, *his* words were upon my lip; and less, in this, the *vassal* than the *friend* of my good lord, it irks me not that I have thrown defiance where never was defiance more justly due."

"Choleric fool!" exclaimed Matilda, exchanging sarcasm for invective, "back to the foggy north! if thou hast wit enough to guide thee thither, and let thy betrayed master reward thee with scourge and shackle, for thus widening into cureless breach the petty rent which perchance one breath of gentle greeting had repaired for ever! It is the trusting of dangerous counsel to such grooms as thee that breaks betwixt knight and knight all league of amity—lights up destruction

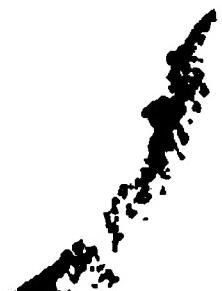
with a misconstrued glance—and builds upon one hot word, or one cold look, strife everlasting ! What dost thou in Winchester alone ? where is thy lord ? why comes he not himself to beard my kinsman, if it must needs be thus ? or rather, why comes he not to pay due homage to his sovereign ? to crush the faction that abhors him, and daily, nightly, toils for his undoing ! If thou art indeed the bearer of his will.—”

“ If ! ” interrupted Raymond indignantly, and then paused to master the feeling excited by the contumely of her address — “ but it recks not,” he continued — “ briefly — full briefly shall my lord’s mission be now discharged.—Behold, injurious lady, yet again, ” (shewing the Earl’s signet upon his finger,) “ this token is my warrant that by *my* lips De Mowbray of Northumberland commends him to Matilda de Aquila. Again and yet again by his best hopes he swears eternal truth, and prays the lady of his love to yield him the frank counsel he seeks in vain from her great kinsman. If he hath wronged that noble earl in deeming him a hollow friend and cold ally, his expiation shall be at his Matilda’s beck—for *her* sake will he stoop to sue of

Hugh-le-Loup that once again they may knit up the severed bond of their alliance. If *not*—if it appear that he suspects *aright*—then”—

“Aye, *then!*”—interrupted the dame, as if in bitter anticipation of the alternative—“how *then*, I pray you? what fiercer insult hath the all-trusted Raymond in charge to fling in the teeth of Hugo Lopus? or what terms of scornful abandonment to stab the ear of his poor kinswoman withal?”

“Lady,” replied the youth, “your own fierce spirit stabs itself for nought. Hear forth what I have yet in charge from De Mowbray, and mark what fetters bind him to his earldom—WAR and REVOLT and RAPINE—each of the fiercest and the bloodiest! the savage Scot upon the frontier with a gathering force—the felon Saxon in dens of murder, wherever marsh spreads or forest darkens—and last, not least perchance, the robber-kings of the deep—the fiery Danes—hanging with a thousand barks of plunder upon the shores. *These*, lady, are the steel bands that hold my lord; and yet, goaded by Montgomery and his faction, King William storms for the *homage* of De Mowbray; as though the bending of a



knee upon his palace-floor were better service than a stricken battle upon the insulted borders of his kingdom!"

"Methought, Sir Squire," said Matilda, "your Earl had so crippled these barbarous Scotch, when their fierce king was slain at Alnwick, that they would scarce cumber the borders again for a fair breathing while. Suffice they still to keep De Mowbray in mail and stirrup?"

"Yes, lady, as the barbarous Welsh, with their rude archery and defenceless limbs, sufficed to hold Earl Lupus upon the marches, when the voice of his bleeding honour cried aloud for him in York. But what avails this bandying of keen terms? know ye that the king hath denied safe conduct to De Mowbray?"

"Stooped De Mowbray to beg for it?" exclaimed Matilda, her eyes flashing perceptibly in the faint star-light. "Why! being *done*, and once *denied*, I know, were *I* a man—a warrior and an earl, how I had borne me! had it been *my* hap to wear steel and a beard, and to be so refused, I would have sped me southward as though a fiend were my courser, ere the lip of mortal man should brand me

with ‘he dares not !’ But what remains ? If the king lists not to be courteous, is it thy lord’s good pleasure to play the *traitor* ?”

“ No, by St. George !” exclaimed Cœur d’Acier, as if startled by the very sound—“ and woe be to other lips than the Lady Matilda’s that dare to couple in *my* ear such name with that of Robert de Mowbray !”

“ Cry you mercy, Sir Champion ! *patriot* shall be the phrase henceforward ! Such was the gentle Waltheoff,* and *he*, too, was Earl of this said troubled Northumberland, and thought, no doubt, his head was in the clouds, not to be struck at by the best He that wore a crown.—Walk to St. Giles’ Hill, good squire, and the base earth shall tell thee *whose* gory visage rolled amidst its filth—*whose* blood crimsoned its stones !—But let that pass. Must the sun rise and find me shivering here, ere I have learnt De Mowbray’s purpose ?”

“ No, nor the moon, though yonder heavens expect her momently, if from *you*, noble damoiselle, I could learn the purpose of Hugo-le-Loup.”

* Waltheoff, Earl of Northumberland, was beheaded on St. Giles’ Hill, Winchester, for rebellion against the First William.

The lady seemed to reflect for a moment, and then replied,—

“Look—Raymond of the heart of steel—say that my kinsman holds his former humour, and will bestow this worthless hand of mine upon thy lord, hap what hap may, so that he come at once to Winchester—how then?”

“Then will I answer for De Mowbray,” said Raymond, “that with such speed as mortal man and earthly courser can make, he will prick southward for Winchester,—aye! though the king were swearing by axe and block, and the headsman that dealt upon Earl Waltheoff stood sentinel by the gate!”

“Or, in the reverse of this,” said the Damozelle, “say that Earl Hugo doubts De Mowbray’s faith, to him and to his sovereign, and scruples to ally him with one suspect of treason, until the King himself be satisfied—what follows?”

“Scorn and defiance in Hugo Lupus’ teeth, for treachery unworthy even of a slave! If it be *thus*, he hath good leave to link him with the faction of Montgomery—heart and hand! Against the Marshal and his minions—and the cold subtle Justiciary, and the ire of the jealous Monarch to boot, De Mowbray will prepare

him as he best may. But, to the Lady Matilda," added the spirited envoy, changing at once both voice and manner—bending one knee to the earth, and taking a slight hold of the lady's dress—"thus lowly—thus humbly did Northumberland bid me stoop, and pray, in his great name, that if he be yet rich in the dear love of one so peerless, she will avouch it in despite of King or kinsman, and, spurning the will of both, fly from their tyranny to where her word shall be as a law—her glance as a queenly mandate—to him who will peril in her defence both life and earldom."

The lady half broke upon this impassioned exhortation by striking the hem of her wide robe out of the grasp of the squire, and saying with a look of no delightful import—

"Arise, fair sir! lest the damp earth sully your riding gear; the rather, too, that, thus standing, your eloquent lip makes fitter approach to my dull ear. Now! what remains? O! pray you, sir, study no *flourishes*, we will content us this chilly waiting-while with the rough *truth*, if it so please ye! Ye spoke of *flight* from King and kinsman to the great northern Earl de Mowbray? Why; 'tis a modest matter to crave withal!—Fortune, and

fame and life, bandage them all together, make but a petty venture for the love of a great earl ! pity that Matilda de Aquila hath but a weak, womanly frame to lodge her indifferent spirit in ; and cannot, in three paces, stride from south to north of this fair land. Alas ! she were a poor plodder on the sandalled foot over hill and desert — a sorry swimmer of the deep streams twixt hence and Bamborough ! but — I crave pardon — these rubs, belike, have been foreseen, and the gentle envoy of De Mowbray hath purveyed him a courser that, if need be, will carry double !”

“Lady !” exclaimed Cœur d’Acier — his patience wearing thin under this sarcastic infliction—but the incorrigible Matilda continued—

“And the FAIR CONSTANCE, too, whose very name calls the hot blood into a gallant’s cheek—*our loving DAUGHTER* that shall be, when it hath pleased God and De Mowbray to make us queen of the blessed north—beseech ye, Sir Squire of Dames ! let us not steal a march upon the Damozelle, lest, at the very outset, the *Lady-Mother* be slandered as a haughty step-dame ! St. Mary for her grace ! I would my loving lord had thought of this !

How if it scare me from my northern queenship, and I refuse to journey hence, even with Raymond of the heart of steel? Perchance thy orders are so peremptory that there is no choice vouchsafed to the poor hand-maiden of Earl Robert? thou hast a trusty band of followers at beck and whistle, to have me hence, by the strong arm, whether I list or not? Is it even thus?"

"If it were thus," said Raymond—his gall perceptibly rising with her sarcasms—"why have I dallied with the fitting hour? Know, lady, that, had I bound me to such service, it should have been promptly done, and that without one idle entreaty—one superfluous prayer. The dust of Winchester had printed no token of bootless supplication upon knee of mine; that which was *to be* should forthwith have *been*, before the lip of Matilda de Aquila could cry, 'hold, hold!'"

"Why, this is well!" she replied, "well! and it likes me well! Over every ruffian under the arch of Heaven, commend me to the frank and fearless one, who strikes me the villain-blow even as he threatens it!"

"Now, by saints and angels!" exclaimed the provoked envoy—

"Now, by men and devils!" responded the fiery girl, "for *that* is the fitter oath—either thou hast indeed belied the great Northumberland, and over-shot, most traitorously, the bounds of thy commission, or there is that under the knightly helm which passes the wit of woman! What! fly like De Mowbray's paramour to his northern towers! No! not were they the palace-halls of a free monarch, rather than the threatened hold of a limitary and suspected earl! a feudal tenant, cribbed in by forms and penalties! Return upon thy unavailing steps, Sir Envoy, and tell Northumbria's Earl that far other is the love of Matilda de Aquila than the puling and sickly tenderness borne by the base daughters of traffic for their mechanic suitors. Hers is the generous passion nursed in the fervid depth of a noble nature for spirits of a congenial nobleness. Such did I hold De Mowbray, and, as such, did I love him! but sooner should this hand be cased in a gauntlet of glowing steel than in the grasp of him who would thus entreat me to the baseness of a dishonoured flight—flight through the guilty dark, like a chased felon, and, merciful heavens! *from whom and with whom?* from the *noble* and

the *great*, with *thee*, and *such as thee*?—No! by my hopes now and hereafter! if De Mowbray would indeed win and wear me, hither in person shall he come, and sue me in the eye of day; from his own lip shall fall the entreaty; and if there must needs be *flight*, with *him* and *him alone* will I depart; no meaner voice shall urge me to the saddle—no meaner hand shall hold the stirrup for Matilda! Away, Sir Squire, and do mine errand! aye, and *faithfully*, or not even in the far north shalt thou find covert from my revenge!"

"Insolent girl!" replied the squire, now thoroughly incensed,—"insolent, proud, and weak! hadst thou the generous nature thou hast vaunted of, never had such suspicion sullied its nobleness! I will indeed so faithfully report thy words and bearing, that, had De Mowbray but one poor tythe of the spirit under this humbler mail, he would give thee, haggard-like, to the free winds, wert thou the fairest of plume that ever glittered in the sun, and of the proudest airy built betwixt heaven and earth!"

Thus saying, and awaiting no further retort, Raymond started indignantly away; the figure of Matilda was lost to him in an instant, and

before a calmer mood succeeded, his foot was upon the threshold of the silent Abbey. Slowly and sullenly did the cadaverous Janitor once more undo the triple fastenings; and not without many mutterings of rebuke sped the exhausted Raymond out of ear-shot, to where the dormitory reserved one of its many cells for his repose—repose which was slow to come, even when the weary head pillow'd itself upon no despicable pallet. And when slumber indeed descended, it was not with soothing and kindly influence. A host of fancies crowded upon him in fitful vision; and each and all were coloured with the hues of hate and enmity. He was now chained upon the floor of the Jew's chamber, and the withered hand of Jodesac seemed raising for his destruction the very poniard he had ventured thither to regain. Then the tones of the Invisible of the Forest rang upon his distracted ear, and the chamber of the Rabbi took the yet darker aspect of a dungeon in the castle of Bamborough, where De Mowbray and Matilda glided around him, arm in arm, smiling in bitter hatred upon his fettered and abandoned wretchedness! The longer this confusion of ideal suffering continued, the more fantastically dreadful did it

become ! Urchins and imps—chimeras of the last extravagancy—whirled and danced and hovered around his bed; wailing, and mowing, and grinning, and gibbering, and pointing with gory fingers ! until, by one of those wild transitions known only to the dreamer and the madman, another and a gentler vision—a form dear to the memory of Raymond—a lovely female form of delicate proportions, and with sweet benignant features—floated suddenly amidst the subsiding horror. It seemed to bend over the sufferer with a mild and soothing regard—pillowed a white, cold, dewy hand upon his burning brow, and, with the other, waved phantom after phantom apart—hushed into solemn stillness the hideous revelry, and, at length, with a departing Seraph's gentleness, melted into the voiceless air.

CHAPTER XII.

"——Take off our veil,
That shadows may depart and shapes appear !"

BEN JONSON—*Cynthia's Revels*.

" Ha ! no traveller art thou—
King of men ! I know thee now."

GRAY'S 'Descent of Odin.'

We must now leave the monastic pallet of Raymond, for the bed of another but, as yet, nameless personage in this veracious history ; we mean the youngest of the two merchants whose negociation of a loan from Jodesac, of certain monies upon the impledging of certain lands pertaining to the earldom of Essex, was related in a former chapter. The reader is, perhaps, scarcely prepared to recognise the said merchant stretched upon a couch of regal splendour, in the most magnificent sleeping

apartment of the royal castle of Winchester—
but it is even thus.

Two persons of no ordinary demeanour awaited in profound silence the termination of his repose, which, by the almost convulsive twitching of various muscles about the eyes and mouth, seemed rather deep than tranquil. One of these attendants, a light, graceful, page-like stripling, stood within the deep embrasure of a latticed window, and silently amused himself by patting the long nose of a greyhound, whose extraordinary beauty suggested the only cause or apology for his admission to such precincts.

The other, a person of graver and maturer aspect, occupied a chair fashioned and carved in such wise as were few seats of that comparatively inartificial day. He arose, however, and drew near, as, after a sound of deep and prolonged respiration, the curtains of the bed were thrown apart by a red and muscular hand, and a powerful voice exclaimed—

“What ho! Fitz-Hammon! Chamberlain,
I say!”

“At hand, my Liege,” replied the officer—
for the voice was that of ‘THE RED KING.’

"How goes the day? is the sun forth?"

"Scarce yet, my Liege, it is but early dawn."

"The better," answered the Monarch. "I will strike me a deer ere he hath been an hour in heaven—give me mine hose."

The required appendages were given by the page to the chamberlain—by the chamberlain to the king.

"Why," said the latter, "what call ye *these*, Fitz-Hammon?"

"*These?*" repeated the gentleman of the chamber, "marry, *hose*, as I think."

"*Hose*, as ye think?" echoed the king, turning the nether appendages round and round—"what cost they, I pray you?"

"Cost!" said the puzzled chamberlain, scarcely conscious perhaps of his iteration—the Page however, relieved him of further effort by saying in a low voice, "Three shillings, so please my liege."

The monarch slid one broad muscular foot to the floor, and surveyed the garments in question by the clearer day-beam—then ejaculated,

"Now, by St Luke's face! hose of *three shillings* for the King of England! Cut them to ribbands!" he added, flinging them in the face of the Page; "and twist a halter of the

base shreds for the loon that knows not better how to charge a king!—Give me others, I say."

Fitz-Hammon, a very brave and powerful knight, related in some degree to the Monarch, and who had subjugated a considerable part of Wales, smiled at the petty whim of his Master, but discharged the functions of his office promptly by going himself to a huge heavily carved wardrobe, whose unwieldy doors were extended by the page, and, drawing from its heaped contents the very worst hose which offered; worse, materially and obviously, than the rejected ones. He then presented them with all reverence and gravity to the half-naked Sovereign, saying,

"These, as I think, my gracious liege, were charged *at a full merk*."

"Aye, by St. Luke's face!" added Rufus, "and they be fit for a king's wear—hose of three shillings! faugh!"

He then planted both feet upon the scarlet floor-cloth, and hurried on the remaining articles of his dress without a single glance of enquiry or observation.*

The form of this adventurous monarch was,

* The above is merely a dramatic version of an odd historical incident.—See (I think) HOLLINSHED.

as we have elsewhere stated, somewhat below the middle size, but admirably adapted, notwithstanding, in the muscular and sinewy build of its proportions, to the laborious exercises in which he delighted and excelled. Inferior as was his stature to that of his sire and predecessor, he was supposed to be the only man in Britain who could bend the massy bow of that accomplished warrior, poise as heavy a lance, and sway as huge a battle-axe. Even in his present morning habiliments, the weeds of peace, the least careful observer would have pronounced him

" —— No carpet-hero trim ;
But, in fight, a champion grim."

The expression of the face was bold, frank, and fiery, and tempered with nothing of the merciful or courteous. The forehead was, perhaps, somewhat too low to express either benevolence or talent, but the eyes, remarkable, as we have already said, for difference of colour, were equally distinguished for piercing quickness, and a glance of stern, caustic severity. His hair, of an extraordinary deep red, descended profusely on either shoulder, in scornful defiance, perhaps, of the

preaching of Anselm the Primate, who everywhere inveighed against that, and similar luxurious fopperies ; and whom the king detested for his bold reprehension, not only of these, but of more culpable indulgences. It might be as much from this dogged spirit, as from any natural inclination to the mode itself, that he also drew on a pair of boots, from the curved toe-points of which chains of massy silver extended to the knees ; a fashion against which, as well as the long curled hair, Archbishop Anselm had levelled his spiritual strictures.

The hasty duties of the toilette discharged, King William stooped with the fondness of a sportsman, to caress the noble hound, which had been impatiently watching the moment of permission, and now fawned and crouched and whined, half pleased, and half afraid, under the patting hand of royalty. The creature was a very recent present, together with a pair of magnificent Norway hawks, from our dark-browed acquaintance, Montgomery the Marshal ; and to this the King referred as he said aloud,

“ Gentle, my Lady the brach ! Methinks thou hast speedily forgotten thy *old* master, to whine thus lovingly upon the *new*. Mass, by

thy love of change alone I should know thee
for a cur of Welsh breed—ha, Fitz-Ham-
mon?"

"Then, look, my Liege," replied the Baron,
whose late repulse from his conquests beyond
the Wye rendered him sore upon that point,
—"look that ye pat him with a steel gauntlet
rather than a bare hand, lest a riven finger or
two vouch yet further for his Welsh strain."

"Tush, man!" said the Monarch, "we will
tear out both fang and claw, when we are next
amidst those mountain-dogs. But *this* is a
goodly brute, although he *hath* forgotten his
late lord."

"He may prick up the ears of his memory,"
said the chamberlain, "in quick time, for the
Marshal hath prayed an audience of my Liege
already this morning, and awaits but your
Grace's leisure to pass within."

"Alone?" said Rufus.

"No—the smooth-cheeked Ilbert de Tun-
bridge—he of the ever-newest garb, who fol-
lows Montgomery as though he were his sha-
dow—he hath also thrust me his delicate
body forth of the bed-sheets ere second cock-
crow."

"Summon both," added the King—"we will
discuss with them even here—and make us

quit of thee, too, white-face!" (to the page, who vanished.) The next moment Rufus was alone, but the door speedily reopened, not for the admission of Montgomery and his friend, but of the tall, thin, sinister-looking man who was the King's companion in his "*Il Bondocani*"* frolic of the previous evening; in plain words, Ralph or Ranulph Flambard, Procurator-fiscal, Lord Justiciary, and Prime Minister of the realm of England.

The character of this extraordinary person is, perhaps, too familiar matter of history to require much pencilling here. He was the counter-part of his master in almost every respect—as warm in the pursuit of pleasure—as indefatigable in the discharge of business—as bold—as turbulent—ambitious and rapacious—as liberal in his patronage—munificent in his establishment—generous in his friendships—inflexible in his resentments. He differed only from the King in one respect, that, in addition to all these *mutual* qualities, he was, at once, a profound lawyer, and a subtle, eloquent, impassioned pleader. He was a never-baffled deviser of the thousand "*ways and means*" necessary under a govern-

* *Il Bondocani*, the jocular soubriquet of Caliph Haroun Al Raschid, when disguised for a frolic.

ment to which equity and economy were alike unknown, and the highest member of which was at once so profuse and so rapacious that it has been well said of him, his necessity would have made him a tyrant, even though his temper had not been naturally despotic. Despising both the secret murmurs of the low, and the open enmity of the great, Flambard studied only to render the Monarch's pleasure subservient to his own interest, and, according to an opinion formed in his own day, "cared for no man's hatred, so that he pleased his master."

So much for the Justiciary of England, under the Red King—the potent minister—the invincible pleader—the plunderer of the rich—"the exterminator of the poor."

"Ha!" exclaimed the Monarch, as this accomplished statesman entered, and glanced his keen eye around the apartment to ascertain its inmates, "in good time, Ranulph—comest thou with Jodesac's shekels under thy cloak, that thy head and pillow are divorced thus early?"

"No, by the mass, brother merchant," answered Flambard, "that treasure is yet to be dug for. I am more like to *take away*

than to bring—having won a fair wager upon my royal Liege. The youth ye wot of is even as I guessed.”

“Thou dost not say it!”—

“I will say it, and swear it!”

“I doubt ye not”—answered the King—“I doubt ye not; but word nor oath win wager upon me without fair *proof*—take *that* with thee, Sir Justiciary!”

“Shalt have it, Sir King,” answered the minister, “if confession from the boy’s own lip will serve the matter. I gave the word to those who kept heedful eye upon him yesterday, and tracked him within the shadow of Ealden Mynstre—there, as they say, he had long converse with one gowned and hooded as a black palmer; marry, it was St. Nicholas’ pleasure that mine espials should not come within ear-shot without peril of detection; but there was much stepping towards and asunder, and flinging abroad of arms, as though a hot matter were discussed betwixt this dark twain.—Anon, they flung asunder, as though an adder had bitten them, and sped with a guilty haste, whither they would. To what lodging he of the sable gown hied him, night and its shadows only

kn̄w ; but our young malapert posted to the Newan Mynstre. *There* have I questioned of him ; and a jolly monk, who looks for good at my hand, bath sworn, by bell and book, that, of a surety, he *knows* him to be De Mowbray's squire."

" What doth he there ?" said Rufus.

" Why, who can tell ? the simple shave-ling, (simple or wily, as the case may be,) concludes but thus, that he is charged with the safe-keeping of his proud master's daughter, Constance de Mowbray, of whose clip-some waist and cherry lips there hath been such harping and hymning at King Philip's court — she for whom, men say, your fair cousin of Albemarle—the gallant Stephen—would go barefoot upon dagger-points, over as many oxgangs as the bright puppet hath years to her back."

" Aye, marry !" exclaimed the King, " a soft saint of Stephen's amorous worship ! even so ! and, withal, a daughter of our sullen, stiff-knee'd vassal, the over-weening De Mowbray—Why ! this is a goodly chain !"

" Add but this other link," said the Justiciary, " that the fair dame hath crossed the

seas under the holy wing of Archbishop Anselm."

"Then, by St. Luke's face! so wooed—so fathered—and so guardianed—she will prove an especial mother of *rebels*, be they priests or soldiers. Ha! *this* were an hostage, now, for the quick coming of Northumberland, worth twenty others—how thinkest thou Ranulph?"

"Touch and try, my Liege," answered the Minister, "have and hold — the puppet is within your gripe. She makes abode at Nunna Mynstre, and from thence, if my informant speak sooth, (and he hath a quick ear in the abbot's parlour,) this gallant of De Mowbray's hath charge to convey her northward."

"But not till they have tasted our castle-fare this blessed Pentecost," said the King, "and seen De Mowbray do homage for his earldom—no, by St. Paul! we will have care of that! Look to the youth, good Ranulph —other gear hath he in hand, belike, than this poor matter of the maiden's journey. Bid Gaffer Bald-pate, thy whisperer of the cloisters, take heedful note who seeketh access to him ; and strive thou, too, to learn at whose lodging

he is a visitor; there be, within the walls of this city, that are like to play the gracious host to such a guest." Then, with a change of tone, as if upon a sudden suggestion, "What, hath our cousin of Chester, sleek Hugo-le-Loup, brought hither his plump body yet?"

"Hugo-le-Loup," returned Flambard, "made entry yester even with a fair band, upon the very heels of the grim Marshal, albeit they hate each other like wolf and cur. I do remember me somewhat of a whispered friendship betwixt the Marchman and Earl Robert —what if this beardless imp of the northern devil bath charge to burnish it afresh? belike my royal liege, by questioning of Hugo Lupus, hath a shrewd fear of some such issue!"

"*Fear!*" exclaimed the Red King, kindling at the mere word; "No, by St. Luke's face! not though a thousand De Mowbrays, with thy politic pate to the boot of all, were plotting treason from Dover to the Cheviots! But I have work to do, here and abroad, and must needs play the heedful craftsman, *using* my tools before I *break* them; and *these*, to give the devil his due, are right tough ones. Look, Scotland is at my feet; thanks to Black Robert, be he false or faithful, *that* hath he

done at least, and *shall do more*. I will have help from him against these barbarous Welsh ; aye, and see his banner dance upon Norman breezes, ere the world be a summer older ! Meanwhile, by the splendour of heaven ! he shall do homage full and speedy, under this castle-roof, or see his earldom smoke for it ! fire and sword shall be mine apparitors—*that* and his fair daughter to hostage—ha ! good Ranulph ?”

“ Tush,” said the Justiciary, “ the last weapon shall fight better a thousand fold than the first. Blood-letting is oftentimes poor leech-craft for a growing treason ; and mark, King William ! the blood of Constance de Mowbray, *threatened but not shed*, shall do more with its pure healthful current to crook the stubborn knee of her sire, than torrents of meaner gore sluiced from base burgesses, greasy mechanics, and poor peasant churls. Why, good my Liege, the heavens are bountiful to us in these painted morsels of soft creation ! I have mine eye upon yet *another* mammet—*another* flutterer of the like gilded wing, that, if we have but wit or grace to use the occasion, shall also prove fetterlock upon a kinsman’s wavering faith.”

"Aye, marry," said Rufus, "and who I pray you——?"

He was interrupted by a low tapping at the chamber door.

"Softly, here are other matters toward; one cometh that hateth thee, good Ranulph, worse than a legion of fiends."

"*One?*" repeated the Procurator Fiscal, with a sardonic smile, "which of a thousand? for by our Lady, I have ever mine hands so blackened with your Grace's work, that never one of your liege barons shuts palm upon them, in the way of greeting, that would not rejoice to make blood and marrow spurt from under the nails."

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed the King, with the same loud and discordant merriment which had startled the long slumbering echoes of Jodesac's chamber. "Truth is a fair gem, were it stuck in the turban of Mahound, but if *thou* displayest it, Ranulph Flambard, I will hold the jewel in the head of the toad no fable. Thou art indeed in little danger of a curse from all men speaking well of thee—but away!" he added, as the knocking was repeated a little more audibly, "take thy *beloved* body down the turret stair."

As Flambard departed at one door, the Marshal and De Tunbridge found access at another.

Whatever familiarity of address and intercourse King William permitted the confidential few who ministered to his pleasures and his rapacity, few monarchs perhaps have better known how to maintain their regal dignity upon ordinary occasions of state, or when confronted only by those with whom communion involves rather the interested and the diplomatic than the social and pleasurable. “More witty than became a king” in his convivial moments: he could restrain his levity when occasion demanded, or, rather, when it pleased him to attribute importance to occasion. Seating himself as the Earl and the Baron entered, he received with sufficient assumption of state the reverential homage of both.

“Hugo of Arundel and Shrewsbury, welcome to our poor castle of Winchester. Welcome, too, Sir Ilbert de Tunbridge; these Whitsun revels had been scantily gay, lacking so choice a gallant. Our good Earl Marshal, the cat-a-mountain Welsh sing jubilee, when thy charger is pricked eastward from Offa’s dyke.”

"They have sung jubilee over my blazing towers, my liege," replied Montgomery, "and viler music than *that* came never upon Norman ear."

"Thy towers shall up again," said Rufus, "to other music, if Norman steel can wring groan or yell from a Welsh throat. They shall up, Lord Marshal, keep and turret, ere the ruins of others have ceased to smoulder, if Norman craft and Saxon sweat may avail for the masonry. And we will have *blood*, Montgomery, *blood*" — half-rising from his seat, as if from the war-saddle, and clutching at vacancy, as if his gripe closed upon battle-axe or lance-stave.

Montgomery smiled his ordinary grim smile.

"Have trust in Hugo of Shrewsbury," he said, "as a ready guest at *that* banquet, my liege, and a curse be upon *his* head that will not to such feast!"

"A prophet-like prayer," observed the King, "of which the granting is foreseen ere it be uttered."

"Meanwhile," said the Marshal, "I have somewhat to crave at your Grace's hands."

"Ask and have, Hugo of Arundel, so that

it be not all Powis-land to the boot of Shropshire."

"Not so, my gracious Liege,—it is but a light boon for a heavy tiding."

"What!" exclaimed Rufus—"another croak from the raven of the western marches?"

"West or east—south or north, judge ye my liege—De Waleric of the New Castle was slain outright yesternoon in the forest."

"God's death!" exclaimed the startled Monarch, "but not by *thee*, Sir Earl! thou hast not slain my vassal and posted hither, red-handed, to avouch it in my teeth?"

"No, by St. John, Sir King!" replied the Marshal, bluntly, "I had rather have slain the slayer, had choice been,—let the fiend that *tempted* betray the *felon* that *wrought*—nothing know I of *him*. But here is the good knight, Ilbert de Tunbridge, whose hap was to hear and see somewhat in the forest. *He* hath a fair tale to tell, if it like your grace."

"Let it be *brief*," said Rufus, with a fierce impatience,—"and *true*, Sir Knight,—look well to *that*! Now, by the might and splendour of heaven!" he added, striding across the chamber in growing fury—"he that hath slain De Waleric in other than fair fight, I

will hang him in his armour, with his own baldric, over my castle drawbridge!"

"Your grace," said Montgomery, "will hunt the boar ere ye have sold his tusks—hearken to Sir Ilbert's tale."

"Out with it! in the devil's name! and look, Sir Knight! if mine own blood run in the veins of any He that hath but lifted finger to this slaughter—say it, and spare not! palter not for *that*! I will have blood for blood, were he the best lance in my broad realms! Now!" and, thus saying, he flung himself again into his seat, with such an eye glaring upon De Tunbridge as somewhat disconcerted that courtly gallant, who, in the narrative he was about to give, had been schooled by his mightier colleague to strengthen every circumstance of suspicion against De Mowbray, and to omit whatever tended to weaken the effect of this disingenuousness—especially all mention of Alberic du Coci, of whom they knew not yet what was to be made, or to which faction he might eventually attach himself, while, at the same time, it was an important fact that Sir Alberic's squire had first discovered and released Raymond from his *bonds*.

With somewhat less than the required brevity, Sir Ilbert narrated the adventure of the preceding day ; forbearing all allusion to the attempt upon Hugh-le-Loup, and dwelling, at full, upon the scene of slaughter presented by the bleeding De Waleric and his retainers. At the account of Raymond's inopportune appearance upon the bloody stage, the surprise of the King fully equalled their expectations, but not the whirlwind of fury they had calculated upon as its accompaniment. Strange as it appears, he broke into no paroxysm—uttered no imprecation—but kept his seat, and, with the cool bitterness of restrained anger, questioned De Tunbridge minutely upon every point ; the latter still endeavouring so to frame his answers that De Mowbray's squire might appear throughout like one “taken in the manner,” as the law-phrase goes, and who had striven to bully it out by sheer audacity and insolence.

“ Why, thus it is,” said Rufus, “ when men are evil neighboured—ha ! is it not so, Montgomery ? ”

The Marshal shrugged up his shoulders, smiled once again, after his grisly wont, and was silent.

“ Tush !” continued the King—“ shrug me no shrugs, Sir Earl ! to the fiend with dark hints ! This forest-matter—this thicket-archery, I say, *Thou* seest whose quiver it hath lightened—ha ? Is it De Mowbray’s working, aye or no ?”

“ Pize on’t, my Liege,” replied the Earl, “ what can a plain man think ? Yet was it your Grace’s lip, and not mine, that first coupled *murder* with the name of De Mowbray.”

“ Why—ye say well,” resumed the Monarch, —“ how thinkest *thou*, De Tunbridge ? Nay, we will have verdict, too, from *thee* ; speak out, and frankly—mince not the wholesome truth !”

“ Your Grace hath heard my story—” said the unwilling knight, better pleased to remain entrenched in ambiguities and indirections, than to avouch either his *real* conviction of Raymond’s *innocence*, or, in straight-forward villainy, a false opinion of his *guilt*. But the impetuous Monarch broke through all these vague lines of intrenchment—“ Aye, by St. Luke’s face !” he cried—“ We will have *thy* judgment, too,—come, palter not with me—forth with thy free thought in free speech ! Is this De Mowbray’s working, aye or no ?”

"Marry then," said Sir Ilbert, driven to extremities, "whose should it be but even his? Methinks your Grace may lightly tell whether Earl Robert be most like to weep or smile for De Waleric's death."

"Enough—" said Rufus, rising, and then added, "Look—this hot gallant of Northumberland's—where lies he now? Who hath attached him to abide our pleasure?"

"None that I wot of," said De Tunbridge, "the gentle Hugh-le-Loup took special care of *that*, and forbade finger to be laid upon him—nay, gave him fresh wings to fly withal—purveyed him a fresh steed, that is, in lieu of one that, by *his* tale, had foundered in mid-travel."

The King stamped—but it was a signal for attendance, not an ebullition of anger. "Hark, Sirrah, in thine ear—" and the page who entered took from the royal lips a whispered injunction to the Justiciary Flambard, that "*he* of the *Newan Mynstre* should be at hand right speedily."

"Now," he exclaimed aloud, as the messenger departed, "thy boon, Lord Marshal?"

"De Waleric's office," answered Montgomery, "as Constable of your Grace's Castle-

upon-Tyne. This do I ask for a fixed friend of mine, that shall do good service to your Grace, as I will answer with my head."

"Shalt have it, Hugo de Montgomery; were it for the fiend himself! what more?"

"Nay, by the mass," replied the Earl—"enough of begging, and to spare. Thus much, with fair thanks for your Grace's accord, and there an end."

And having thus accomplished their object, the Marshal and his companion took leave of the royal presence. In one breath the monarch bade them farewell, and bitterly cursed the interruption they had occasioned to his intended sport. Snatching a cloak and hunting-bonnet, he called aloud for attendance. "To horse! and away, ye knaves!"—adding, like a true son of the Conqueror,— "He that holds me from the saddle but another moment, by St. Luke's face! I would the horns of a stag were in his entrails!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"Is it fit to say to a King, 'Thou art wicked,' or to princes, 'ye are ungodly?'"

The Book of Job.

FROM the sleeping-chamber of a King, our scene shifts to that of the worn-out Raymond —a bleak cell of the dormitory of Newan Mynstre.

Startled from the calmer slumbers to which the subsiding fever of his blood had at length consigned him, the youth awoke with the first chime to matins; to gaze upon the lank visage and listen to the nasal tones of the Sacristan; a ghastly, hollow-eyed official, who, with pious severity, which Raymond would gladly have exchanged for a little human indulgence, shook the recumbent visitor by the shoulders as though to awaken the very dead, or, at least, to shake all life out of the living.

"It is the hour of matins;" said the cowled disturber. "Wilt thou that thy immortal

spirit be refreshed by the blessed service, or that thy vile body be comforted in sloth, like the beasts that perish?"

"I would thou couldst have given me to choose while yet in the far region of dreams," said Raymond, upon whom the hand of sleep pressed almost as heavily as that of his tormentor—"but since thou *hast* summoned me thence with thy holy clarion——"

He finished the sentence *practically*, by arising; not, indeed, like the startled hare from her form, but, tardily, upon the elbow, and going through divers of those reluctant and sluggish evolutions with which the half-awakened faculties, mental and bodily, preface their entry upon the campaign and actual service of the day.

"*Quod facis, mox facito,*" said the impatient monk, "the which," he added, "if the ear of thy carnal vanity receiveth it not with understanding, may be expounded unto thee thus—'what thou doest, do quickly.'"

"Patience, holy father," responded the layman, "I will but 'gird up my loins,' as ye churchmen phrase it, and then have with ye, in God's name."

"Ye say well," responded the sacristan,

“surge, eamus hinc,” which, being interpreted, signifieth ‘up and away!’”

“And hast thou, good father,” inquired Raymond, “extended the like ghostly care to my companion? The youth, I mean, who partook with me yester-even of the good things of the refectory, and whom we of the sinful laity call, Torfin Paganel?”

“Trouble not thy thoughts with that,” said the religious, “he hath been cared for.”

And, with this unsatisfactory answer, ‘content perforce,’ Raymond ‘briefly put on manly readiness,’ and followed the man of bell, book, and candle towards the chapel. They passed the cell which he remembered as that assigned to Paganel—a glance showed that it was now untenanted; but, upon entering the church of the monastery, where the solemn ritual of matins was about to commence, he looked around in vain for the form or features of his fellow-squire. As vainly did he endeavour to abstract his mind from things secular to things spiritual, during the holy service. In spite of many efforts, matters considerably below the moon so maintained their preponderance, that, at length, good and orthodox Catholic as he was, the entire body

of our youth's thoughts became exclusively terrestrial. “*Misericordias Domini*,” or whatever canticle served the occasion, rose and thundered, and swelled and died away, unnoticed, if not unheard, by the secular visitant of St. Grimbald's. Not that the preceding day's adventures had furnished him with very agreeable morning cogitations—he knew that the result of the interview with Matilda had been fatal to the most important object of his mission. De Mowbray, in fact, although ordinarily frugal in speech, had not, in this instance, been sparing of injunctions to his envoy to use all art and address—entreaty and remonstrance—to leave, in short, no spring untouched by which Matilda de Aquila might be won to throw herself upon the honour of her suitor—“Look, Raymond,” said De Mowbray at parting, “that thy very soul be upon thy lip when thou shalt urge this matter in the ear of Matilda!”—a pleasant recollection! linked, as it now was, with the consciousness of utter failure. Nor was the earnestness of his lord attributable to any suspicion that either timidity or repugnance in the bosom of the lady would throw a stumbling-block in the path of success. The

former feeling he knew to be an alien from her nature, and for the latter—so slight were the grounds of apprehension—he calculated upon the very wildness of the proposed step as, in itself, sufficient inducement to one of a temperament so fiery. It was but, therefore, to make assurance doubly sure, and to guard, perhaps, against anything of youthful levity, that the else tacit Northumberland heaped injunctions upon his agent with such unwonted verbosity.

The total failure of a commission so dear and delicate offered but a sorry cordial for Raymond's refreshment upon his homeward journey; nor is it a matter of surprise, that he half determined to make another and a final attempt upon the resolution of Matilda, if by any medium he could now gain access to her alone. This, in spite of his wounded pride, and, indeed, of a secret wish that the haughty lady might never become the countess of his lord, engrossed for a time his whole spirit, and held it from all sacred fellowship.

Then came another and a gentler theme. Wooed from the distraction in which perverse circumstances had involved them, his thoughts once more reverted with a grateful willingness

to the fair, and—if not greatly changed—the gentle inmate of Nunna Mynstre. He recalled the sylph-like form—the all-surpassing eye, and lip, and brow—the thousand fascinations which, even upon the aspect of her childhood, shed the “devouring grace” of perfect loveliness.

All these the vivid memory of the heart called up with its enchantments; and then was Imagination summoned to body forth the paragon of matured excellence, to which this fairy vision must now have expanded. How the aerial artist performed her task we tarry not to describe, nor had the summoner himself leisure to contemplate it, for the expiration of matin service recalled him to the busy world of realities.

His first duty was to pay greetings from De Mowbray, both to the Abbot and his illustrious guest. He began, therefore, to look round for a medium of introduction, but was spared the necessity by a summons from the former dignitary to attend him in his chamber, “where,” said the pallid messenger (his friend the sacristan,) “ye will behold a burning and a shining lamp—even the blessed Primate, Anselm himself.”

The first object, accordingly, which struck the eye of Raymond upon entering the chamber, was the majestic and venerable figure of Archbishop Anselm, “Primate of all England,” to which painful pre-eminence he had been lifted by the remorse of Rufus when sick ; most reluctantly, indeed, upon his own part, the pastoral staff being not only figuratively but literally forced into his hand, which he clenched against its acceptance as though the insignia of ecclesiastic power had been a bar of glowing iron. The sagacious Prelate foresaw what obstacles the King’s arbitrary temper and irreligious principles would prove to every endeavour for working good in the church, or, as the religious expressed it, “for beautifying afresh the tabernacle of the Lord,”—a speedy result shewed the correctness of his anticipations. The churchman and the monarch were almost instantly at variance—the former crying aloud against simony and the retention of vacant benefices in the regal hand, for the malappropriation of their revenues, (an outrage and a scandal, indeed, to all Christendom,) and, on the other hand, the latter exclaiming bitterly against the factious and presuming priest, who not only dared to remonstrate with his

sovereign upon imputed ungodliness, but had even gone so far as to recognise the papal supremacy of Urban the Second, during the schism between that Pontiff and Gilbert of Ravenna, in which Rufus sedulously avoided espousing either side, and forbade the choice also to any in his dominions, until his own royal judgment had decided. To crown all, Anselm had murmured at the demand upon him for a contribution of men and arms towards the Welsh campaign, pleading ecclesiastical exemption from all secular burdens, and maintaining the canon against their striking, directly or indirectly, in person or by proxy, with the arm of flesh and the carnal weapon. He had, indeed, upon the fury of the King rising to an inordinate pitch, so far yielded the point, as to furnish forth a limited body of retainers, but so mounted and equipped, and, in fact, in themselves “such pitiful rascals,” that men of even less modesty and decorum than Sir John Falstaff might well be ashamed to march through Coventry with them.

This, however, was the only instance in which Anselm made the least sacrifice of those rigid opinions which he had brought to the high office of Primate. Mild and gentle in his

demeanour, as he was pure and temperate in his life, he was yet inflexible in resolution—uncompromising in principle: neither to be ridiculed nor bribed out of the one, nor threatened nor cajoled out of the other.

Such was the character of him, who, when Raymond entered the chamber of Abbot Robertus, occupied the high seat of that Dignitary, while the latter stood reverentially at his side, not more in this than in other outward respects cast into shadow by his majestic visitor. Both, indeed, were venerable by age and office, dignified in garb, and solemn in aspect and demeanour; yet, even to a less discerning eye than Raymond's, a marked difference was perceptible. Upon the brow of the Monk, solemnity strove with a sullen gloom—the shadows of repining guilt lowering over its morose front, and claiming, as it were, affinity with the vindictive curl and quiver of the pale irascible lip beneath. Authority, indeed, sat there, but with a tyrant's inexorable sternness, which never mercy or the sister-charities hallowed with their communion; nor virtue, "sweetly austere," mellowed into benignity. There were lines, deep-furrowed, which spoke the ravages of passion as plainly as the dried channel of a

mountain torrent bespeaks the fury of that which ploughed it into desolation, and, with the next tempest, may again thunder over its shingles.

In the majestic aspect of the Primate, mercy and righteousness might indeed be said to kiss each other. There was the awfulness of command, but chastened by the sweetesses of humanity,—the spirit of high resolve, but tempered with such a meek and placid grace, as might have disarmed all but the enmity of regal pride. It seemed as if Passion could no longer throw her disturbing shadows over his benignant features, nor even “the hectic of a moment” break the fixed purity and benevolence of their expression. The pencilings of time, deepened, perhaps, by a few natural sorrows, spoke only of age and study—of vigil and of penitence.

As Raymond crossed the threshold of the chamber, he made a deep obeisance to both Fathers, and then stood reverentially silent to await their pleasure. It was expressed by Anselm in few but gentle terms.

“ Oh, benedicite, good youth; draw near, I pray thee. Give me thy name. Thou art a vassal of De Mowbray’s—ha ? ”

"His squire and humble friend, most reverend Father," answered the youth, with perhaps a slight something of the "devil's darling sin" in his accent.

"Oh! doubtless—doubtless," replied the Archbishop, "I mean no other—I mean no other. The rather that thou art he to whose care I must yield up his goodly daughter—is it not so?"

Raymond again bowed low in affirmation, and then, kneeling upon one knee, said,—
"First, reverend Father, thus did my noble lord command me to tender, with all humbleness, thanks to——"

"Thy brother-worm, good youth," interrupted the Primate, hastily waving him from his reverential position—"kneel thou and thy great lord to Him who is the Lord of all, and not to man whose breath is in his nostrils. Up, I beseech thee! Touching thy lord's daughter ——Look, gentle squire, I have forgotten thy name, even if thou toldest it, which I remember not——."

"Raymond, most holy Father."

"Aye, Raymond—Raymond, out upon old heads! Why, look thee, Raymond, look thee, gentle Raymond, I do remember somewhat

of thee—somewhat of fair repute in thy lord's speech when last we met in Westminster. Thou hast well named thyself the humble friend of De Mowbray—but mark, good boy, add thou *truth* to *humbleness*, and *zeal* to these, and *righteousness* to all! Admonish thy lord thus—first, that he look right well to his fair daughter. Let not the comeliness of her delicate youth be staled in the eyes of men *here* as in France—let not her modest brow be flushed with the hot glances and licentious speech of wassailers and ribalds; the free-tongued gallants of the camp and court; the scorers of God's law; such as do prank them in an effeminate garb, lewd and luxurious; wear crisped curls, even as a flaunting harlot, and go like the sleek Agag, delicately, pleased with the cursedness of their peaked boots; as though, by such monstrous abominations, to belie the word even of that Mighty One who hath said, ‘man cannot add a cubit to his stature.’ What!” exclaimed the old man, kindling as he went on, “knoweth De Mowbray nought of the hot vanities which, but of late, they of the godless court of Philip have acted with such blazon and clamour, *in honour* (as their foolishness expresseth it!) of his gentle and comely

one, even of Constance de Mowbray? the galliards and the banquetings—the tiltings and the tourneys—the jousts and the fierce rushing together of man and horse—as though the jeoparding of the breath of life for a light word, or a vain simper, or, it may be, for the binding on of a foolish garment, were indeed a thing meet and fitting in Christian men—worthy to promote the honour, and gain the love, of a modest maiden; and a sweet savour to Him in whose word it is written, ‘Be ye meek and gentle,—‘mischief shall hunt the violent man!’”

Not amongst all the heroic compeers of

“—————Uther’s son
Begirt with British and Armoric Knights;
Or all who since, baptized or infidel,
Jousted in Aspramont or Montalban,
Damasco, or Morocco.—”

could this philippic against the darling pastime of the age have been poured into a more unwilling ear. A natural modesty and deference for age and station, held Raymond, indeed, from openly avowing the heresy of his dissent, but the objurgation had proceeded, perhaps, from the only lips in Britain whose

words, upon such a theme, he would not have fearlessly gainsayed. The embarrassment of his silence was relieved by the Abbot, who observed in low tones—

“The Damsel hath scant peril therein, seeing that the Monarchs of this realm list not to allow of jousts and tournaments,* save under penalty of such vast fines and talliages, as few even of these stormy warriors love to subject their coffers to.”

“Is it even so?” said the Archbishop, better versed in ecclesiastical canons, and the decrees of Italian counsels, than the civil jurisprudence of England,—“then do I marvel the more that the wisdom of man should, in these days, savour aught of the wisdom which is from above! but the time cometh, yea, and is nigh at hand, when laws and edicts shall be as little worth to restrain the frowardness and the fury of these haughty warriors, as fetters of

* “Tournaments were certainly practised in France and Normandy before the Conquest, but not permitted in England until sixty years after.”—STRUXT.

Sundry Popes forbade them by decree, and the Kings of this realm, (before King Stephen,) would not suffer them. They were quite suppressed by Henry II., and again tolerated by Richard I.—The tax upon such as engaged in them varied according to the quality of the champions.

flax girded around a devouring flame ! even now their neck is as an iron sinew, and their brow as strong brass ; and, under aught of healing restraint, I tell ye, they are even as a wild bull in a net. Look, Father of St. Grimbold's !" he added, pointing with his shrunken finger to the Squire, " Were he but dubb'd of their proud order, and were there such a matter of tinkling cymbal and sounding brass now afoot, *there* standeth one who would go forth of our presence in hot haste, and ride with harbergeon and sharpened steel into the very midmost of the vain hurley, even with the words of truth and holiness tingling in his rebellious ears ! Speak now, and confess, and lie not unto me, Sir Squire, even thus would it be, ha ?"

Raymond did not allow, in this appeal to his candour, for the idiomatic hebraism of the Prelate, in the use of the offensive verb "to lie." With flushed brow and sparkling glance, he replied to the venerable querist in louder and more decided tones than had yet escaped him.

" Rather had I that sharpened steel were driven through the mail of mine own bosom, than that the baseness of a lie should sully the free spirit within ! As ye have said, holy

Father, would I indeed do ; and not under the skies of Britain breathes there Knight or Squire who would do less, were he the holiest even of those who are about to battle in the far East for the tomb of Christ. Wherefore should I, and such as I, seek to be better and purer than they ? ”

“ Because,” answered the zealous Churchman, “ it is written ‘ Thou shalt not follow the multitude to do evil ! ’—but why strive I to gather figs from a thistle ! *quod genitum est ex carne,* ” he added, turning to the monk, “ *caro est.* ”

“ *Qui est de terrâ,* ” replied the latter, in the same strain, “ *de terrâ est, et de terrâ loquitur.* ”

“ *Sermo tuus veritas est,* ” responded the Prelate. “ But, alas ! not *there* doth the evil fall and cease ; the spirit of violence hath not entered alone into the fierce laity, but—with deep shame do I say it—it pricketh the heart and ~~sins~~ even of our own degenerate orders ! Yes ! as the Lord liveth, to such fearful height hath the wickedness of this generation arisen, that even the servants of the living God, monks, with their priors and abbots ;—canons of the church with their very bishops ;—even these, I say, shame not to crush in the

harness of sin and slaughter, limbs sanctified unto the ministry of the Lord of Hosts ! to dip in the blood of their fellow-man, hands which heretofore have moulded the body of their Redeemer ! How thinkest thou of *this*, Sir Squire ? ”

“ I have indeed heard,” answered Raymond evasively, “ of helm and hauberk displacing cowl and frock—aye, even mitre and dalmatique.”

“ *Heard!* ” repeated the Archbishop—“ yea ! and *beheld* too, or much and strangely have mine old ears been abused touching your northern wars ! I say unto thee, youth, even thus hath it been with that unholy churchman, Baldwin of Tynemouth, whom thy Lord, De Mowbray of Northumberland, unworthily made Prior thereof, when, in the fulness of his might, he drove, at the lance-point, the ancient dwellers of that solemn house forth of its walls, while winter-winds were ~~at~~ the keenest, to embrace the rocks for a shelter, and to drink of the showers of the mountain ! Do I not know how he hath made the blessed pile of St. Oswyn a tributary cell to that of St. Albans, and given it, for an habitation and a sanctuary, to such as the subtle Abbot

thereof, Paul of Normandy, lists to send forth of his crowded towers? Holy and zealous, albeit a Saxon, was that ejected Abbot of St. Oswyn's, into whose high place thy master hath raised this potsherd covered with silver dross—this priest of Baal, worthy to be bound and slain at the brook Kidron—this Prior Baldwin! Even in the far south it hath been told me in what wise he goeth forth of his dark towers; not riding in meek humbleness upon a mule, or, it may be, plodding upon the sandalled foot, but reining proudly a fed charger, until the hoofs thereof be broken with its prancings! Not, I say, as a Christian pastor, upon errands of mercy and loving kindness, to do an alms, a penance or a shrift; but like a warrior girded for the battle-field; fierce of heart, and bloody of purpose; clad in steel harness; and grasping the carnal weapons forbidden alike by the laws of God and the canons of his church. Behold! a cry hath gone up against thy Lord for this unrighteousness; and even under the holy roof he hath defiled, shall the finger of chastisement be upon him! He hath touched the ark of the Lord with his fierce hand, and shall be smitten under its shadow, even as the son of

Abinadab was smitten at Perez-Uzzah ! he hath despised a dwelling of Jehovah, and a stone from its battlements shall crush him ! Go, thou of his banner and his household ! and fear not to avouch unto him, ‘ thus saith Anselm of Canterbury.’ If he will not yet listen to reproof, and put away from him and from his earldom this abomination unto the Lord—if he yet harden his heart, and will not cease to lift up violence into a rod of wickedness ;—upon him and upon his seed shall be the curse which cometh ! and, upon the tool of his iniquity, even upon this accursed Baldwin, that destruction which followeth hard upon pride—that fall which breaketh in pieces the haughty spirit !”

The tremour of age, which for awhile enfeebled the utterance of the Prelate, died away as the loftiness of his enthusiasm prevailed. Every accent came full and clear upon the sense, and there was an accordant change in the countenance ; for, instead of its ordinary placid benevolence, it exhibited the sternness of offended virtue. With such an expression, Nathan might have said to David, “ Thou art the man !” or Samuel denounced upon the son of Kish the judgment which

stripped him of his kingdom and his life. He stood for a few moments after the conclusion of his anathema, and then slowly sank into a seat, but with his kindled eye yet fixed upon the emissary of the denounced. Nor was that subordinate wanting in spirit or discretion for his lord's defence. Firmly, though with a modest bearing, he urged that the great Prelate knew nothing of the distracted wilds in which Prior Baldwin had stricken with the secular arm for his patron De Mowbray. He painted in strong colours the rebellious spirit of the half-subdued Northumbrians, and the fierce inroads to which the border country was open from the avenging Scot.

"Here, in the peaceful south," he said, "all is calm breeze and gentle tide. The warder sleeps upon the battlement, and the priest lifts not his eye to note whose step meets him in the loneliest path. But far, far other is it in the stormy north ! There, billow and blast threaten the strongest bark—knight and vassal pillow them upon blade and buckler ; and the Father Abbot that would keep his cloisters from the fire-brands of Scot and Dane must know how to strike a good blow when need is, and to rein a charger in such

wise that a levelled spear bear him not from
the saddle for evermore."

The Primate shook his head, but pursued
the theme no further. He merely intimated
his desire to surrender charge of the Lady
Constance, and for that purpose to accompany
Raymond immediately to Nunna Mynstre.
The latter, with renewed obeisances, with-
drew, and awaited the leisure of Anselm in
the Abbey court.

CHAPTER XIV.

" A house there is (and that's enough)
From whence, one fatal morning, issues
A brace of warriors, not in buff,
But rustling in their silks and tissues.
The first came cap-a-pee from France,
Her conquering destiny fulfilling ;
Whom meaner beauties eyed askance,
And vainly aped her art of killing.
The other Amazon, kind heaven
Had armed with spirit, wit, and satire,
But"———(here 500 stanzas are lost).

Gray's 'Long Story.'

THAT *cooling of the heels* proverbial amongst those who wait the leisure of great men, was not, in the present instance, inflicted upon Raymond ; the Abbey-gates being speedily set wide for the departure of Anselm.

With his accustomed simplicity, the good Primate rejected all attendance from the brethren ; and, accompanied only by the Squire, proceeded on foot to the convent of Nunna Mynstre.

The Lady Abbess, a tall, thin, pale, ascetic-looking dignitary, appeared immediately upon the annunciation of her visitors, and besought, upon bended knee, and with clasped hands, the benediction of the saintly Anselm. His induction to the ghastly lady's parlour succeeded that edifying ceremony ; but the footsteps of his lay companion were restricted to the precincts of a narrow and gloomy plot y'clept, in much too-flattering phrase, THE GARDEN, although grass, and ivy, a few medicinal plants, and one sad, solitary yew, with its sepulchral load of sombre green, presented the whole horticultural boast of Nunna Mynstre.

Into this dull retreat, a few windows, narrow and long—dimly latticed and strongly ironed, looked from the sullen tower whose base it skirted ; and Raymond could find no better amusement than glancing his eye successively along them, in expectation that chance might place, at one or other of the grim apertures, some gentle visage, peering under the uplifted veil, to relieve, with its sweet lineaments, the monotony of grey wall and iron stauchion. But no such enlivening apparition presented itself ; and the impatience

with which he awaited a summons to the presence of Constance became, at length, so feverishly irritable that it was with difficulty he controlled its indications even when the re-opening Abbey-door placed the object of his solicitude suddenly before him ; accompanied, however, by the Archbishop, the Lady Abbess, and another female, who, by her attire and veil, might be a sister of the house.

The group was striking in all its members, but upon no form or feature, save those of Constance de Mowbray, did the glance of Raymond rest for an instant. *There* it riveted itself with a fixedness which seemed to communicate a species of torpor to his whole frame ; not a limb stirring from the position it assumed after the first hurried advance of a few steps towards the object of his fascination.

Well might he thus be entranced ! well might the coldest eye that ever glanced upon youthful beauty flash with unwonted beam, while bent upon this “cunningest pattern of excelling nature !” Well might the chivalry of France evince, in the tourney and at the banquet, that enthusiasm of admiration which awoke the pious anger of Archbishop Anselm ;

for upon a fairer and brighter creature the sun had perhaps rarely shone, even where he shines upon the brightest and the fairest.

Slightly above the middle stature, exquisitely, perhaps faultlessly, proportioned, and matured by nineteen summers to the rounded fulness of womanhood, the form of Constance displayed that rare union of delicacy and firmness—of grace and freedom, which the most favoured children of nature alone receive from the boon parent. Nor was the enchantment of this symmetry of person broken by features of less than accordant loveliness. Dignity and sweetness were the twin genii of their expression ; for every lineament bespoke high and pure and warm affections—the lofty mind and the generous heart.

Shall the ambitious spirit of portrait-painting go yet further ? shall we presumptuously attempt detail ? No ; we feel how beautifully, how truly a great living poet has said—

“ Enough of rose-bud lips and eyes,
Like hare-bells bath'd in dew,
Of cheek that with carnation vies,
And veins of violet hue ;
Earth wants not beauty that may scorn
A likening to frail flowers ;
Yea, to the stars, if they were born
For seasons and for hours.”

We feel, in short, that the “common places” of descriptive rapture, its gems and stars, and flowers and corals, are things of tarnished splendour and worn-out glory,

“That 'gin to pale their ineffectual beams.”

The original of our feeble picture might well defy all astral—all floral imagery. An incarnation of that beau-ideal of loveliness, sometimes beheld by the dreaming eyes of Imagination in its world of bright abstractions; but alas! how seldom upon the common earth “in sober certainty of waking bliss.” We leave Constance de Mowbray, then, to the sculptor, whose “fine chisel can cut breath,”—or to the painter, upon whose pallet are

“Hues that have words, and speak to ye of Heaven.”

How long the entranced Raymond—for such he appeared—might have retained the statue-like fixedness of posture we have described, had not the voice of the Primate broken upon his stupor-fit, it is somewhat difficult to say. Archbishop Anselm, however, was the last of human beings either to guess or suffer the tyranny of such emotions. He saw a fair girl and a gallant youth meeting after the lapse of years, and, probably, by voice

and glance, confessing strange and embarrassed feelings. But he saw not, he dreamed not, how much of joy and doubt, and fear and hope, and curiosity and admiration, thrilled in their mutual bosoms, and struggled, perhaps, with a misgiving sense of something hollow or perilous in their indulgence. He saw

“ Two beings in the hues of youth,”
even as we have pourtrayed them ; but it was with the eye of an enthusiasm that fed upon far other nutriment ; and, to the zealous churchman, nothing appeared but a light helpless maiden, given, with little wisdom, to the guardianship of a stripling.

“ Daughter,” he said with cold solemnity,
“ behold thy protector — ”

Then, after a moment’s pause,

“ Youth—receive thy charge. Benedicite, my children ; go in peace—*peace* do I say ?” he added, turning to Constance, with a sympathy rather calculated to alarm than soothe, “ alas, maiden ! I know not where, in this stormy realm, is the lip that shall, henceforth, be warrant for peace to *thee*.”

The lady raised her head which had been reverentially depressed, and answered, with melancholy firmness—

"There is none, holy Father. Enough do I know of this fierce England—enough have I heard even of its noblest and its bravest, in one short night, and in the chambers of a convent, to bid me say of peace, even as said the prophet of old—

"I look for it, and, behold, trouble!"

But were it *not* thus—were the paths of many thornless and sunny—Constance de Mowbray hath yet her own dark cause to look for other—far other and darker pilgrimage—the cloud above—the pit-fall below."

"Nay but, gentle and fair one," said the Primate benignantly, "be yet of braver cheer! The land, indeed, crieth to heaven against the fierceness and fury of its inheritors; and not even in the paths of the mighty may reverence wait upon thy steps, nor the name of De Mowbray be as a towered city and sanctuary for thy virgin peace. Yet is there a broader shield and mightier spear to champion thee, in thy need, than ever yet was brazed upon the arm, or grasped in the fierce hand of mortal warrior. Look thou to them! and, that thy hope be not as the driven stubble, touch not, even with a little finger, the defilements of

this haughty and dissolute capital. Drink not of the cup of her abominations. Come not into the hot throng of her vanities—her tiltings, and her feastings—her drunken banquetings, and wanton galliards, and proud arrayings! Hear and be wise, O maiden, yet pure and good! and remember for what cause He that is mighty denounced, upon the lovely ones even of his chosen Israel, treble confusion, wrath, and bitterness! Was it not because the daughters of Zion were haughty, and walked with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, mincing as they went, and making a tinkling with their feet? I say unto thee, maiden, even thus is it with many a proud and painted one in these riotous towers of Winchester! this gilded lazarus-house! this huge banqueting-chamber of all uncleanness! Come not thou into their counsel, nor lay up for thyself the terrors of that time when the bravery of their tinkling ornaments shall be taken away, the bracelets, and the mufflers, and the chains. When for a girdle there shall be a rent, and sackcloth for a silken stomacher, and burning instead of beauty!"—

A farewell “benedicite” followed this solemn adjuration, and when the Lady Constance,

like the admonished King of Scots in Lithgow
Abbey, raised her head to reply,

“ Her monitor was gone.”

He had received and acknowledged the mute reverence of Raymond, and turned towards the court-yard wicket, followed by the Abbess. The extended hand of the latter, and the single word “ Tarry !” gave to her attendant nun sufficient charge of espial over the damoiselle and her new protector.

There was a strange silence of a few moments after the departure of the churchman, broken yet more strangely by the voice of the nun, as she abruptly exclaimed—

“ Now let us sing praises to the lips of Saint Anselm ; and, give thanks that, at long last, they hold their peace !”

Then, to the great surprise of her auditors, but particularly of Raymond, in whose ear the tones seemed familiar, she proceeded to address them alternately in like strain—

“ Youth of sinful steel ! get thee sackcloth for a hauberk, and the staff and gourd of a begging friar for brand and buckler ! Most duteous of damsels ! look not in the face of a man, at peril of bell, book, and candle ! She

that danceth a court-galliard, Satan shall pipe to her. He that lifteth a wine-cup, all Tophet shall pledge him ! Finally, ye of the world's vanity-fair ! eat not, fight not, marry not ! fast all, pray all, preach all. Give to the holy monks and nuns, and die in hair garments, with the odour of faith and famine."

" Now, in the name of every saint above," exclaimed the astonished Constance, whose matchless eye had dilated to the full, during this strange rhapsody. " Who, and what art thou ? "

" Now, in the name of every fiend below," answered she of the veil, " who, or what should I be, but a sworn daughter of Nunna Mynstre ? one of the blessed sisterhood who dwindle righteously to skeletons in cell and cloister ! a living-dead-woman of this holy tomb ! What thing of the upper and breathing world, think ye, what creature of flowing blood, and flesh not frozen, could vent ye such a homily, and with the like godly glibness ? "

" Say rather," replied Constance, " what sister of holy rule would vent such ribald scorn upon the order she had sworn to reverence ? No sister *thou* of Nunna Mynstre ! or

never, until this, came there from the lips of woman veiled and vowed, words which so betokened a spirit worldly and fierce."

"Ha! keen as a Welsh shaft, if not as truly aimed," rejoined the nun. "Shoot yet again, fair archer! and, a queen's pearls to a beggar's beads, thy wit splinters the target; or, haply, this all-ingenuous gallant, this blushing Squire of Dames, hath somewhat of a random guess whether I be true nun or frail worldling—ha?"

"Put me not to it," said Raymond, "lest I offend. A Saxon witch gave me some skill in these dark riddles."

"Poor boaster!" answered the nun, "mine is in the night's deep shadow, and defies thee."

"Defy me not," rejoined the squire, "and, for thy riddle, repent thee of it and quickly, for in *the shadow of the night* have I heard words which they who uttered sorrowed in the morning beam to remember. May it not be thus?"

"No, by yon unchanging heavens," exclaimed the mysterious one, "not thus with me! Word uttered, or deed done, in the black midnight, repent me not when morning is at the brightest! Let the poor *outside*

change, even as it may, from fair to foul, from silk to sackcloth. It is but as the turret-flag which every idle breeze shakes as it lists. *Within* is the fixed spirit, based like the massy towers, that never tempest could put crack into!"

"Stronger towers than these," said the youth, "have I seen topple upon the heads of those who defended them."

"It may be so," rejoined the nun, "but know, good youth, and profit by it if thou canst, there is *that* in human resolution, besieged in such a fastness as *this*" (striking her bosom) "which outdoes rocks of adamant, and puts the solid granite to shame. Canst thou believe so much?"

"Aye, by our Lady," ejaculated Raymond mentally. For, as it is needless to inform the reader from whose lip of alternating passion and sarcasm such startling expressions fell, so it would be equally superfluous to add that he to whom they were addressed fully divined their hidden meaning, and felt that all hope as to De Mowbray's embassy was thus definitively put to rest.

He saw, however, the growing surprise of Constance, and hastened to suspend it by saying, with something of indifference—

“ Well, I have emptied a fair quiver in this blind archery. Methinks, maiden, thine Abbess will be the best expounder, ha ?”

“ I dare thee to propose it !” she replied hastily—“ aye ! at thy proper peril !—within these walls the solemn hideousness of veil and scapulaire is better ten-fold than charity for hiding the multitude of sins ; and yonder pious phantom of an Abbess, mole-blind and adder-deaf to human purpose or human pity, yet jealous of the honour of her convent, would work, in the revenge for its least slander, *darkly* as the one reptile—*fiercely* as the other. A hundred feet below the cloister-pavement are cells too horrible even for human thought or belief ; and *there*, though ye were ten times the squire and daughter of De Mowbray, two whispered words of mine, inferring worldly passion or light speech—or touch of hand or lip—”

“ Oh, peace !”—interrupted the indignant Constance, colouring scarlet-deep from brow to bosom—“ peace ! but for shame, if not for piety ! Be what thou wilt—we question thee no more. Look, Raymond, if yon wicket—”

“ Spare bootless labour,” said the nun, “ 'tis

barred and locked. What, maiden ! thus stoutly championed, fear ye a simple daughter of holy rule for a wild word ? How, if, in the grim towers of Tynemouth or of Bamborough, thou hadst a sharp-tongued step-dame, to vent her shrewish clamours, and lay a tyrant's hand upon thee from cock-crow to the curfew ? Ha ? by Mary-mother ! there are (and within hollow, too,) who have done something to bring thee out of God's blessing into such sunshine."

Constance now felt a touch of apprehension. She turned to her protector, and said, in low tones, " Heed not — reply not — Raymond — she is mad ! "

" As ocean, storm-tossed !" said the quick-eared object of the remark, " pin thy belief to that. And look," she added, as the re-opening wicket brought the Abbess once more upon the scene—" Behold the mistress of the mad ! maddest of all—mad with the tyrant's and bigot's pride. Now, for a space, Constance de Mowbray, farewell ! The fame of a fair idol brought me to Nunna Mynstre, to judge with mine own eyes the wisdom of its worshippers : pity that there are fierce hands

raised to dash it from its pedestal. For *thee*, stripling,—beware of a coming hour,—a hawk from the proudest eyrie is in mid-swoop—”

She ceased as the Abbess drew almost within hearing ; and, falling a few steps back, resumed her former air of coldness and abstraction, mixed with the ordinary monastic reverence for the presence of “ the superior.”

The disturbed aspect of Constance, however, did not escape the observation of that ascetic matron, even for an instant. Darting alternately upon the youth and his charge a searching glance, she said with constrained gentleness, “ I trust thou hast brought no tidings of evil chance to this poor maiden ? ”

“ None, holy Mother,” replied Raymond. “ Her noble sire commends him, in all health, to his most dear one, and prays her homeward with dispatch. My tidings and my mission are at the coldest when I have said— we journey hence at night-fall.

“ At night-fall ! ” repeated Constance.

“ At night-fall ! ” re-echoed the displeased Abbess.

Raymond bowed, in silent re-assertion.

“ I would, then,” said the latter dame, drawing up her cadaverous person to its full

spectral height, “ that other walls than *these* had been the maiden’s sanctuary the whilst. *Our* gates, Sir Squire, holy and hospitable alike, are wont to open for the wanderer’s entrance at dim eve, and not to close on his departure. Unmeet it were even for rudest pilgrim, reckless of gloom and chill, storm-proof, and fearless of the worst hap, to journey forth at such an hour, and do a sort of scorn to our poor towers; but for a helpless maiden——”

She paused. Raymond simply pleaded the command of his Lord. So rapidly, he said, drew to a close the term peremptorily assigned for his mission, that, with all the haste of untimely travel, they would scarcely reach York before it expired.

“ To night,” he repeated, “ we must hence; unless,” (and a deep obeisance accompanied the clause,) “ unless the noble Damoiselle herself gainsay the pleasure of her sire.”

The Abbess, to do her justice, was much more scandalised at the alternative of filial disobedience under her roof, than that of quitting it at an untimely hour. “ What!” she said, “ shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?”

Constance, however, was neither speedy nor vehement in asserting her own unqualified obedience.

"Not yet, holy Mother,"—she said, after a brief silence; "not yet—although in the path to which De Mowbray commands my steps there is a serpent coiled, and a snare dug. But be it so. My father's will—Our Lady's blessing and thine, good mother, shall be my warrant for submission. When the pit yawns, there may be time to cry 'thus far, but not beyond.' "

For a moment or two the Lady Abbess "stared in stony-trance" upon the youthful utterer of these dark forebodings; and then, turning to the Squire, said—"And at what hour, I pray you, is it your pleasure that the maiden boune her for this shadowy journey?"

Something in the look and manner of Constance, even more than in her words, convinced Raymond that her anticipations of peril had stronger grounds than mere girlish apprehension. It was essential he should look clearly and steadily upon every coming evil, and know at once with what opposites he was to cope. He ventured, therefore, not only to evade the monastic lady's question, but to

request a perfectly confidential interview with his charge. The cold-eyed vestal complied, ungraciously and abruptly, with the intimation. She beckoned to her strange attendant, and, muttering something of “higher and holier things that awaited her ear, than the stormy vanities of this passing world,” quitted the melancholy garden; not, however, without a concluding Scriptural compliment to those remaining, and vented, too, in very nearly audible terms, namely, that “the lips of fools shall swallow up themselves.”

Thus flattered, the Squire and daughter of De Mowbray were left alone.

END OF VOLUME I.

RUFUS
OR
THE RED KING
A ROMANCE

"He feared God but little—men not at all."

WILLIAM OF MALMSBURY

IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. II

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RUFUS.

CHAPTER I.

“ SHW me the noblest youth of present time,
Whose trembling fancy would to love give birth ;
Some god or hero from the Olympian clime
Returned, to seek a consort upon earth ;
Or, in no doubtful prospect, let me see
The brightest star of ages yet to be,
And I will mate and match him blissfully.”

Wordsworth.

She was a Phantom of delight
When first she gleamed upon my sight,
A dancing Shape, an Image gay—
To haunt, to startle, and way-lay.
I saw her, upon nearer view,
A Spirit, yet a Woman too !
Her household motions light and free,
And steps of virgin liberty ;
A perfect woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command :
With reason firm, and temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength and skill ;

And though a Spirit yet, and bright
 With something of an angel's light,
 A creature not too bright or good,
 For human nature's daily food,
 For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
 Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles !

Wordsworth.

CONSTANCE DE MOWBRAY followed with her eye the disappearing Abbess and attendant, until the gloom of the postern hid them,—then turned to her remaining companion, and in a tone which seemed to annihilate years, and make the past the present, uttered the single word “Raymond!”

It was an appeal from the restraint and formality which had yet hung with a chilling heaviness upon their greeting,—an appeal so eloquent, that the youth felt the blood rush to his brow, and knew not, perhaps, what fell from his lips, as they faltered forth the answering exclamation—“Noble lady!”

“Noble lady!” she repeated, in accents of kindly reproach. “Oh, time and change! *Once*, Raymond, it was not thus! Why have we driven the Lady Abbess from her garden? True,” she added, looking around—“'tis but a sorry

paradise—less fair, by the blushing of a thousand flowers, than mine at Bamborough—that little plot!—but why, why do I recall it? here, at least, the hand of culture is sometimes feebly busy—*there*, doubtless, all hath long been trampled into dust, desolation—oblivion."

"The mailed hand and the armed heel," said Raymond, "give sorry tendance to garden beauty.—Evil visitants! they sow not, neither do they plant. Seven winters, Lady Constance——"

"Seven winters," interrupted the lady, "have done much. They have frozen all that to *my* heart was once dear and genial. To me they have made Bamborough itself a haunted pile, darkened with terror and suspicion;—a thing of icy halls and cells—gloomy and voiceless chambers, where the tempests of the Cheviots beat unrepelled, and drift their benumbing snows even into the very bosoms that throbbed faithfully around the hearth-stone of my childhood!"

"Not into mine, Constance!" exclaimed Cœur d'Acier, startled out of his reserve,—"not into mine: far other tempests have beat *there*, but

had they shaken it to the very core, there are pulses that would have defied them!"

"If there be one," she replied, "but *one*, that throbs generously, save me from those that beat but for my destruction! Let not *thy* hand, Raymond, of all others, drag me to it! deal with me as with a sister,—a sister threatened with such wrongs as should pour liquid fire into a brother's veins! Be true to me in word and deed! hide not from me the face of ruin itself: say, why am I now recalled to my father's tottering earldom? Tell me the mystery,—a dark and strange one, if I read aright, between thee and yonder seeming nun?"

"For your own peace, lady," said Raymond, "ask not *that*—it is an evil omen that ye have thus met!"

"I knew a Raymond once," she replied, "who would have laughed at omens. In him mystery had no share; open as day, I could have read his inmost heart better than any breviary. Were it *he* who stood before me, I should not fear to journey hence, under the double cloud of night and ignorance—I should have beheld sadly, but calmly, every coming evil—I should have felt,

that in a changing world, there was yet one Being unchanged towards Constance de Mowbray!"

"Now, by every hope that is most dear to me!" exclaimed the Squire, "I am yet that Raymond—that self-same Raymond! Outwardly, changing years have indeed wrought upon me, as upon all—roughened the smooth cheek—clouded the tranquil brow—perchance, thrown heedfulness upon the once reckless lip; but in heart, lady, in true and constant heart, I am unchanged as yonder changeless heavens! There is no peril, Constance, that for a glance—a breath of thine, I would not rush upon, shieldless and weaponless! but were the lifting of a finger coupled with dishonour, *that* finger would I not lift! no, not for the monarchy of a hundred realms! Enough, then, that in me, it were foul dishonour to reveal the mystery of yonder seeming nun. It is the secret of one whose very name I cannot breathe to thee without a base betrayal of my trust."

"It were alike shame, dishonour, misery, to doubt thee!" said Constance, with deep emotion—

"Raymond," she continued, "it seems but as the flitting of a summer since thou and I, children alike in years and thoughts, were happy playmates in the halls of Bamborough; and now——"

She paused, and gazed upon him with all the ingenuous ardour of early feeling; forgetful that even to that involuntary admiration, pure and natural as it was, the very lapse of years that kindled it, had opposed, at length, as the world judges, the colder wisdom, the prudery, and the refinement of advancing womanhood. A sense of this, and of having, both by words, and the more potent eloquence of looks, betrayed an emotion so flattering to its object, flashed suddenly upon her, and awoke embarrassment, too obvious for even an attempt to colour or conceal.

She resumed her self-possession, however, and continued;—

"Yet, even for this remembrance—remembrance of a time so pure and happy, I will have trust in thee, Raymond, firm as a castle's base! But never more, oh, never! shall the rich promise in boyhood of honour, valour, knightly

courtesy, of stainless faith and lofty daring, of all that graces chivalry ; never shall the promise of these awaken in *my* bosom the hope of a generous manhood, if *thou*, Raymond, art not as true to me in my hour of need as ever yet was avenging man to oppressed woman ! Fast and darkly that hour approaches ! if it shall find *thee* cold, false, or craven——”

“ *Then*, Constance” exclaimed Cœur d’Acier with enthusiasm, “ fling to the winds all trust in youth or age, in deed or word ! Be it from thence the blackest warrant of all infamy—the last, worst brand of the world’s scorn, even upon the vilest and the basest, to name them but in one breath with that master-caitiff who forsook Constance de Mowbray ! but till then——”

“ Till then,” repeated Constance, and with a look which might have made cowardice and treachery disclaim their nature, she extended to him as warm and beautiful a hand as ever made human lip proud with its touch ! For Raymond not to have pressed it rapturously to *his*, would have savoured rather of the heroism of a saint than of a child of knighthood ; one, too, whose nature was of the torrid, and not the

temperate zone of the passions. It was rapidly withdrawn; but he saw that the action did not spring from affected delicacy, or the pride of conscious beauty. He marked her quick and apprehensive glance at the windows which overlooked their conference, and it seemed as if the wild words of the nun rang again in his ear—“*or touch of hand or lip.*” He almost expected to see the sharp lineaments of the Abbess at one of those melancholy apertures, attenuated by indignation to their most ghastly length, and scowling anathemas upon the profanation of her dedicated limits by their worldly emotion.

A like vision, probably, floated before Constance. “The Lady Abbess,” she said, “will yield us scant leisure for this conference.—Tell me of Bamborough, Raymond,—of my father,—how fares it with De Mowbray?”

“Well,” replied the Squire, with an almost mechanical unconsciousness of what he uttered.

“In health,” continued the lady, “but not in fortunes! No, Raymond, seek not, even in kindness to affirm it. I have had warning of a tempest fast gathering in my father’s earldom—fast gathering, and soon to burst. Whisperings

of scorn, if not defiance, cast in his sovereign's teeth ; of homage proudly withheld—of discontent fiercely avowed—of hasty and secret levies —of castles manned——Raymond ! all these point with their spectral fingers at one sole word—REBELLION.”

That word of evil omen dissipated at once the abstraction of Raymond, and, after a moment's self-parley, he resolved to be ingenuous to the uttermost with one so beautiful and so helpless, who thus threw herself, open-bosomed upon his sincerity. De Mowbray, indeed, had so far shut his purposes in his own bosom, that not a hint of their nature had fallen even upon the ear of this his most trusted retainer ; the latter, therefore, although he had seen too plainly that the elements of a convulsion were busy around him, knew nothing of the time, manner, or ultimate intent of their explosion. He could, of course, disclaim the charge of a rebellious purpose upon his lord's part, but scrupled not to admit that worse than coldness had grown up betwixt De Mowbray and the King, and that the earldom of Northumberland everywhere exhibited such

an aspect, as gave little promise to the Lady Constance of a happy or peaceful home.

“ Home ! ” she exclaimed. “ Oh, long have my father’s towers ceased to be such to me ! He loves me not ! he *never* loved me. His fierce ambition—why should I shrink to say it ? abandons me to the stormy world, almost ere I have cast a look upon it ! Long exiled from his eye and heart, wherefore, at such a juncture, am I thus darkly, peremptorily recalled ?—hurried by night from the towers of my Norman kinsman—flung on the mercy of a stormy sea, until the very winds, kind in their fury, drove me perforce to shore ? and now, with scarce the respite of a night in this bleak convent—alone, un-tended—denied even the poor services of one handmaid,—I must away in darkness, and in guilty secresy, as though there were dishonour upon my name, or the price of blood upon my head ! Raymond, I am a feeble girl, but yet, a daughter, and a Mowbray ; no despicable trembler at slight evils—no willing fugitive from a father’s peril or adversity. But not for the sweetness of filial soothing am I recalled ;

no ! in the towers of my sole parent, far other destiny awaits me ! This ruined heart must be the gage of treason—its very life-drops wrung out to brim the goblet of ambition. Oh, tell me not that I am deceived ; the heart that is to be withered or broken becomes prophetic in its misery ! Raymond !——”

— She broke off abruptly ; looked for a moment upon the earth, and then full in the flushed cheek and burning eye of her protector, became deadly pale, and, after a glance of almost terrified expression around the enclosure, said in low tones—“ There is a purpose—O God ! that my lips should utter it !—to doom me—me, Raymond, child as I am ! the untimely bride—the ever-miserable wife of De Albemarle—of one whose license is a proverb and a bye-word—a libertine, boundless as air and ocean !—To make this hand the pledge of a rebel’s faith with his rebellious peers, the seal to such a bond of blood and——. Oh, Raymond ! ” (laying her hand, now icy cold, upon his,) “ I had rather it were gloved in devouring flame ! I had rather my temples were wrapt in their grave-clothes, than scorched with the crown these

dark and designing men seek to place upon them!"

"A crown!" echoed the astonished Raymond.

"Brief splendour," she continued, "and lasting wretchedness! To this, Raymond, thou art conducting me, and no prevention! no help—no rescue! unless, miserable alternative!—unless the avenging King tear the daughter of the attainted De Mowbray from the licentious ribald De Albemarle, to fling her into the brutal grasp of De Lacy!"

For some moments, Raymond literally stood "agape and aghast" at this spectral association of rivals, called up, as it were, by the exorcism of woman's sorrow and terror: he then broke forth with a sudden and almost savage energy:—

"Stephen of Albemarle? the over-weening ribald! De Lacy? the grasping tyrant! I will first wash these hands in the blood of both! I will tear De Lacy's heart out if he but stretch a finger towards thee! were it by the high altar of Newan Mynstre! *Fifty* crowns let Stephen de Albemarle win and wear, if the fiends list to aid him, but not Constance de Mowbray! I will

wear his head upon my lance point first ! Prating braggart, tongue-valiant fool that I am, to speak of it ere I have struck him dead ! But —saints of Heaven ! who plots to put a crown upon the brow of that silken slave of license—that never-sated voluptuary ?”

“ Raymond,” said Constance, “ I have yet hope—a trembling hope, that my father hath not cursed thee with his confidence—that thou art yet unmeshed in the net of his ambition. Oh, then, beware of its deadly trammels ! Let not even fidelity to thy lord—let not even the commands of De Mowbray—drag thee into the snare ; for *he*, Raymond, *he* it is who seeks to make De Albemarle a monarch—monarch of England ! if thou canst credit a tale so monstrous. For *this*, De Mowbray is about to strive with heart and hand ; aye, with the *chained* hand and the *crushed* heart of his daughter !”

“ Before that hour,” said Raymond, in a tone which marked the full exasperation of his feelings, “ *mine* shall be chained and crushed in a charnel-house :—but look !” And, as he uttered the word, they beheld once more the mysterious Lady of the Veil, standing by the

postern, and indicating, by a raised hand, that the allotted term of conference had expired.

"We must part," said Constance, "I am summoned."

Raymond replied in low, but deep and impassioned tones—"Lady, nay, Constance! dear Constance! dark as the storm grows round us, I see an angel that sees help. Have trust in me. Pillow a thousand hopes *here*," (touching his breast.) "I am more than I have yet seemed—more than the nameless thing De Mowbray holds me.—But, first, we must from hence; aye, and with speed; for if the sun again rise upon us in Winchester, other and mightier hands may prison us within its battlements than those of earl or baron. To-night, then, and at the mid-hour, since we must needs play the coward's game, to horse, and away! Flight shall be our first victory. The grasp of the king eluded, other perils are remote. De Albemarle still revels in France or Normandy; and for De Lacy, if *his* greeting cumber our path, a spirit whispers me that it shall prove right lowly—as low as his grave!"

In another instant, it was the Abbess, and not

Raymond, who stood by the side of Constance. As the *outer* portal closed upon *his* departure, they re-entered the cloisters by the *inner*, and were followed by the superior's strange attendant, pacing with as much staid precision, as if the shadows of a convent had deepened upon her from childhood,

"Ere upon life she cast a look,
Or knew the world that she forsook."

CHAPTER II.

" My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, ' Come with us ; let us lay wait for blood ; let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause ; let us swallow them up alive as the grave ; cast in thy lot among us.' My son, walk not thou in the way with them. If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain. *If thou sayest, ' Behold, I know it not,'* doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it ?"

Proverbs of Solomon.

WHILE Raymond was occupied as we have related in the last three chapters, a scene was passing elsewhere, in which he was sufficiently involved, by the evil chance of De Waleric's death. For the development of this, we must request the reader to accompany us to the palace of the Justiciary Flambard ; that is to say, to the strong castle of Wolvesley ; not, gentle tourist of southern Britain, the fortress upon whose shattered remains thou hast perhaps stood, to bless the picturesque genius of

Oliver Cromwell, so well skilled to round off acute angles, and break upon all formal continuity of lines in castellated architecture ; but an erection of much greater antiquity, said to have arisen at the command of the first Christian King of the West Saxons, and, although considerably enlarged and modified at subsequent periods, according to the prevailing taste of each, especially after the Conquest ; still bearing, at the time we treat of, distinct evidence of their Saxon origin. It was in fact, a very powerful structure, and few, probably, would then have suspected, that, in little more than forty years, it would require to be repaired in such perfect wise, as the Scotch saying reports an ingenious Celt to have re-organised his gun, when he gave it a new stock, lock, and barrel. Nothing, in fact, was *half* done by Henry de Blois, brother of King Stephen, who threw down without scruple the massy halls of Saxon royalty — halls in which the pride and policy of an Edgar had been alike gratified, when from his semi-barbarous throne, he beheld the tribute of wolves' heads, exacted from the Welsh, and paid, according to old tradition, annually within these

towers, which, at length, drew their appellation from the circumstance.

But this is irrelevant. Down, drawbridge, and up portcullis ! *our business is within*. There, in a chamber furnished with all the magnificence and luxury the age had attained, sat the proud owner; the basely-born, and courtly-bred ; the subtle, and the terrible ; the fierce, and the facetious ; the grasping and the munificent ; the toiling diplomatist, and the laughing *bon-vivant* ; the queller of all liberty, the patron of all art ; the happy courtier, and the dreaded pleader. To crown all, the Justiciary, trampling upon all justice, as in days subsequent, the Prelate, scoffing at all religion.*

Around this planet of evil lustre were several whom circumstance and faction had, for the time, rendered his satellites, each of whom, nevertheless, would have stabbed him to the heart with infinite satisfaction, had the posture of affairs been then favourable to such an exploit. A community of evil passions indeed, and seeming interests drew them together for the

* He became Bishop of Durham.

passing while, and induced an interchange of hollow courtesies between parties, who, in reality, hated each other most intensely. With the mutual consciousness of this, however, they endured collision, until the fulfilment of their joint purpose in the league should dissolve its discordant materials, and restore them to that state of enmity, which seemed as natural and fierce as the warfare between Milton's shadowy champions, Hot, Cold, Moist, and Dry.

Amongst the visitors at Wolvesley, we may enumerate Milo de Miles, Earl of Hereford, and Lord High Constable; Reginald de Lacy, a powerful baron of the day, with whom we have yet much to do; and, besides others of lesser name and influence, the reader's grim acquaintance, Hugo de Montgomery. This latter personage stood in his ordinary defensive guise; mailed to the teeth, half supporting himself upon his huge two-handed sword, the hilt of which rose breast high under the bulky warrior, and bore, indeed, no obvious disproportion to the large and sinewy hand that grasped it. De Lacy, the youngest man in presence, stood also, as if in courtesy to the Marshal; while the Constable

and others sat around their host, who occupied his splendid seat with the self-possession of one accustomed rather to receive deference than to extend it to others.

At the instant of their being thus grouped, a pause had occurred in conversation, and each seemed to await some expected entry or circumstance before again addressing his companions.

Suddenly the door flew wide, and in posted the well-apparelled body of Sir Ilbert de Tunbridge, who doffing his plumed cap, advanced with a hurried step to the assembled conclave.

"How now, De Tunbridge," said the Marshal,
"What good news with thee?"

"De Mowbray is at York," answered the gallant, with flushed cheek, and fiery eyes.—
"At York," he repeated, "with a vast power!
call ye *that* good?"

"Aye, by St. Hugh of Cluni! passing good!
The nigher the ditch, the quicker the fall!"

"The threatened head," said Flambard, "lives to grow grey. This rider will leap both ditch and rampart, if he come fairly hither, and bend his knee but mid-way to the earth in the king's

eye. Tush, sirs ! there lacks but a quick stride or two, this way or that, to make or mar De Mowbray. If he hold off till the court breaks, we crush him ! if not, and his reluctant homage be given, even with frowns and curses here in Winchester—look to yourselves, fair sirs ! So much for that. What more, Sir Knight ?"

" This, of what stamp ye will," replied De Tunbridge—" Four barks from Norway on the high seas, De Mowbray hath laid clutch on—how richly laden, the devil knows, not I ; but they have buried their anchors in Tyne sands, that's certain."

" The fiend pampers his own," said the Constable. " How learnt ye this ?"

" What recks it ?" interrupted Flambard.—" Look ; thus it is ; these barks will float the fortunes of their captor ten tides above the moorings of ye all, or give them to the breakers, dashed in splinters."

" How judge ye so ?" queried Montgomery.

" Thus, gentle Marshal," returned the minister, " these ships we talk of shall the red fingers of Rufus itch to have in tow. Failing that, he will look for gold, gold, noble Hugo, which even

priests confess answereth for all things. Now, if De Mowbray yield, and, to the boot of that, pay homage for his earldom, by good St. Peter ! although the words be all but growled in the king's ear, and every merk down-counted with a curse, I say, and say again, that ye have sown the wind ! Thereafter, wrestle who will with black Earl Robert, his guerdon shall be cracked ribs, by 'r Lady ! ”

There was a moment's gloomy silence after this consolatory assurance, broken only by the mailed foot of Montgomery beating that monotonous tattoo which has long been considered as sacred to St. Nicholas ; his grizzled head keeping time, as it were, by a measured vibration, to the ill-omened harmony. At length he muttered, over the cross-hilt of his huge weapon,

“ How, if he list to yield nor ships, nor gold ? ”

“ Then, Marshal of England ! ” replied the Justiciary, rising, “ and thou, Sir Constable, and good knights all, buckle mail and belt brand—spread banner and couch lance ; and ho ! for the rebellious north ! Thus shall it be, if, by God's blessing, Northumberland prove stubborn. Meanwhile, let us to other gear touching the

beloved Robert.—Whose dexterous hand can fling upon him the blood of De Waleric? Whose lip can swear? Who saw? Who heard?"

Again there was a gloomy silence; and again it was broken by the Marshal.

"Pish!" he exclaimed impatiently; "this skills not, Sir Justiciary. I wot it is for *thy* clerkly craft to furnish forth this matter; to give it eyes, and ears, and tongue. By St. Peter! I will be plain with thee, Ranulph Flambard; men say, thy mother was a witch, and the very devil himself thy father.* It were right strange if, with as petty a springe, thou could'st not snare as mighty a fowl. Tush, man, thou hast the craft and glib speech to make the cleanest hand in Britain blood-red as though it were dipped in the far waters that drowned King Pharaoh."

The Justiciary was, at least, *clerkly* enough to smile at this happy image; but he gave another turn to his mirth.

"*Clean hands*, said ye? By St. Mary! a proper jest! Who amongst ye all can pluck

* The popular genealogy of this *beloved* minister!

me such a marvellous thing forth of his gauntlet? Not *thou*, Montgomery, if they of the Western Marches speak sooth. No! nor thy fair brother, Arnulph of Pembroke, the sweetest delight of whose soul is murder! Nor thou, De Miles of Hereford! nor thou, nor thou, nor thou!" turning to each of his remaining guests except De Tunbridge, and then adding with smooth scorn, "For thee, Sir Ilbert, I will say nought of blood upon *thy* hands; belike thou would'st have fear to sully thy fair hawking gloves."

All affected to smile darkly at these sinister jests; every finger, at the same time, tingling to repay them with cold steel; but the time, as we have said, was not yet ripe. The Justiciary went on.

"Well, red or black, it boots not. What of the kinsman of this murdered man? the sad-eyed, sober-browed De Aldery. What make ye of him?"

"'Faith, neither shaft nor bolt,'" said Montgomery. "De Aldery? pish! a clod—an icicle—a gallless pigeon, that would not peck even the hand of a babe, if thrust into its nest. His

blood is thinner than water, and creeps through veins of snow. 'He, forsooth, prides him upon his generous thoughts. *He* will not hold a foul suspicion, *He* ! He will not think it of *the noble Earl* ! Now a plague upon such icy-livered varlets ! they would not move an' if De Mowbray had stabbed their fathers !'

" Oh ! but ye wrong De Aldery," said the Constable, " flint-cold as he seems, there is good fire to be struck out of him yet."

" What prate ye of fire or snow ?" exclaimed the Minister. " Who sees not upon what current this bark is afloat ? Fat Hugh-le-Loup, the glutton of Chester—*he* it is that hath all the ~~say~~ with De Waleric's kinsman ; he hath a strong hand upon both oars of the youth's thoughts, and rows them whither he will. And, methinks, we have all heard somewhat of a league betwixt the Western Wolf and the Northern Bear, if they but listed to avouch it frankly. Tut, tut, Hugh Lupus hath cleansed De Mowbray of all suspicion in the bosom of De Aldery. But yet ! is he so resolute to hold him mum ? Will he not hither upon our fair entreaty ?"

" No, by St. Anton !" replied De Tunbridge,

"he holds him coldly off; charges his kinsman's death upon the Saxon, and there an end."

"Oh, doth he so?" said Flambard. "Why! there an end of him. *That* maim, methinks, will heal without a bandage. Lacking De Aldery in our purpose is but a finger scratched, and not a hand chopped off. But thus it is when men are led like babes! He *dare not* come; *dare not*, at peril of a chiding from Hugh Lupus, or a dark look from the omnipotent De Mowbray, who wears a dagger in his brow to kill with frowns! the blessed saints buckler ye all from the fell dint thereof!"

"Aye," growled the provoked Marshal, "and from that worse weapon upon the lip, which stabs with smiles."

"Oh, both, both, both," responded the unwinching Ranulph; "marry and amen. But now, with right Christian wisdom, from praying to plotting. Here is new work for us all; to defend the villainous Saxons. The swine-fed churls, albeit, if the truth were foolishly spoken, as surely guilty of this slaughter as ever was Cain of his brother Abel's, must needs be quit of a dark deed for once. Haply we may, with the

better conscience, cumber their broad backs another day, that, for this present need, we strive to tumble the black burden upon loftier shoulders. Mark, I have here a deputation from ‘the hundred’ in which De Waleric fell, praying the king’s remission of his fine; for that, as they plead, the levies to uphold his Grace’s court this blessed feast, have shorn them to the quick. Now, to that marvellous He amongst them all who bears a brain, it shall be whispered after what fashion he were wise to plead; he shall have hint to cry aloud, and spare not, against a *Norman*, seized, as it were, red-handed upon the very threshold of that slaughter-house, even while the blood yet flowed — weaponed, scathless, and guiltily plunged amidst fern and coppice. On him and on his followers (for there shall not lack proof that he *had* such) the Saxons may charge home De Waleric’s death; and then let Raymond of the heart of steel, if so ye call him, give them the lie as he best may.”

“Well,” said the Constable, De Miles, shaking his heavy head, “for mine own part, I should but swim with leaden fins in these dark floods of

policy; but, if I heard *thy* story aright, De Tunbridge, this bridge will scantily fit the stream. How, if De Mowbray's knave *prove* that he was gyved to the earth, foot, hand and head?"

"Gramercy!" exclaimed Flambard, "look well to *that*, Sir Knight! Ye told me not of *gyves*. Who cut him loose therefrom, I pray you?"

"S'death!" cried the perplexed De Tunbridge, "How shall I tell ye that? I was busying me the whilst with the dead men."

"Dead men!" said the Justiciary. "Oh, thou should'st have let the carrion bleed in peace, and busied thee with the living! Dead men, forsooth! a very profitless cumber! Good lack, good lack! Here is a piteous rent in a fair garment!"

"Plague on't," rejoined Sir Ilbert, cudgelling his recollection soundly. "It was . . . tut! either 'twas one of Hugh-le-Loup's varlets, or a bustling knave of the home-come gallant Du Coci—one or other, I am well nigh sure."

"Why, if the *first*," said Flambard, "good night all! our bark of trust is amidst the breakers. But, if the *last*, yarely, my hearts! we

still may run before the gale ; gentle Sir Ilbert, hoist thou sail the first, and have Du Coei hither with all speed."

The knight vanished upon his errand.

"Now, on my life," observed the Constable, "Sir Ilbert is a pack-horse in these matters."

"A serviceable man," said Flambard, with the half contemptuous accent and manner of one who praises a good groom.

"Aye," replied the Marshal, in like strain, "managed aright, and humoured."

"But now," resumed the Minister, "touching this said Du Coci, whom I remember me at Gloucester, a fresh gallant and a free, hurled out of his saddle by De Mowbray, as though a rock had been flung upon him,—think we of him, good Marshal? Shape we our work before we buy the tool?"

"Buy him and stint not," said Montgomery, "he is of that metal which does good service. He hath such cause to hate De Mowbray that it will be right strange if he strike not as bold a stroke as who strikes boldest. Moreover, Randolph, Alberic Du Coci hath that in brow and bearing—action and speech, which the King

the entertainer ; “ we have, even now, drank to the binding up of the broken lance, and we look to be pledged therefor, in clerkly-wise, with very quaintly-conceited phrases.”

“ Then have ye dipped into a bankrupt’s coffer,” answered the knight, as he set down the cup after no despicable libation. “ But, methinks,” he added, looking around him, “ there is here better work toward than such jack-an-ape mopping and mowing as ye would put me upon. Look, sirs, I have so pieced together the broken lance that it shall right well content me to devour it bodily, steel-head and ashen-stave, if it do me not yet fairer service than ever, when I have, once more, friend to back, or foe to face. Truly, as yet, I know not whether my hap is to meet with one or t’other in merry England.”

“ Oh, both, by St. Mary !” cried the Justiciary ; “ we will purvey thee both, and that speedily—nay, thou shalt have choice, too, gentle Sir Alberic—choice to thy heart’s content—as thus :—Here is a fair company, earls and so forth, Marshal and Constable, and the fiend knows what ; six knights and one poor courtier ; all proper men as ever went unhang’d ; abundantly

weak in spirit and *not ambitious*. Now, whether wilt thou that these take thee by the hand or throat? choose—good Sir Alberic, choose. Again: there is an earl in the far north, y'clept De Mowbray, very sufficiently stuffed with pride and potency—a notable man of his hands with lance and battle-axe, and, withal, thirsting with the thirst of the desert-lion for the heart's-blood of Du Coci. Choose yet again, Sir Alberic! shall it be—up and strive, or—down and sue? gallant defiance, or accurst submission? chivalrous daring, or foot-licking baseness?"

"Why!" returned Du Coci, "this now is such choice as to a drowning man 'sink or swim. gaffer? choose ye!' as if it were a nice choice, God wot! betwixt seven foes and never a friend: But, by St. Francis," he continued, looking at Flambard, "ye are a subtle nation, ye Justiciaries! Good reason have ye, if ye but offer one poor bezant for the service of as much blood and bone as may be thrust into one pair of gauntlets! Come, there is a mine to dig under De Mowbray's foot—that I perceive and plainly; go to, then, what shall I have for taking spade and mattock with ye? tell me *that*, fair sirs."

“ Oh, but ye run before your horse to market,” said the Justiciary; “ this quarry is to be struck before we price the skin. *What shalt thou have, quotha?* marry, thine own head upon thine own shoulders! a very blessed matter in these evil days, I promise you.”

“ Very like,” answered the adventurer; “ but I will hack it thence with my own dagger, if there be not brain enough within to bid me hold off hand from profitless peril.”

“ Profitless?” exclaimed Montgomery, “ profitless, say you? Is there no profit in the saving of life and limb? Hast thou forgotten De Mowbray’s oath in the fair aisles of Durham?”

“ Draw nearer home, Sir Earl,” said Flambard; “ hath the good Knight forgotten in what wise De Mowbray hath avenged him on De Walleric? hath he forgotten THAT? *there was a hideous blow stricken at thrice a hundred miles off!* By good St. Peter! I will say this—and say it to ye all—ye are not safe, Sir Knights! not one! He who offends Earl Robert—heaven be with him!—there is little else for him in this world but to be well shiven—*well and quickly*, by’r Lady. Marry, touching the work

in hand, if I were not a thought less wise than generous, it would be *my* cue to wash mine hands on't, now and for ever. What is De Mowbray to Ranulph Flambard ? or Ranulph Flambard to De Mowbray ? Verily, we were ambitiously horsed, indeed, if there were not prancing space for both, enough and to spare, 'twixt Bamborough and Wolvesley ! Strong man though he be, I think he is scarce Samson enough to lumber down these towers about mine ears ; and, were *his* earldom split into a hundred baronies, not a hide thereof would come under plough of mine. Now, it is far other with Hugo de Montgomery ; aye, and the rest of ye ! Ye would be all for a quick finger in *that* pasty, I warrant ye. On the other hand, if the oak of De Mowbray's fortunes roots itself but the stronger for this blast, it is not upon field or forest of *mine* that his avenging fingers can lay clutch ; it will be *thou*, gentle Marshal, and the good Constable here, and stout De Lacy, and spruce Sir Ilbert, and others of your faction, that will have the broken bank of the stream to scramble upon. Good faith, when the evil wind sits in *that* quarter, look to thy goodly manors in Stafford-

shire, Earl Hugo!—Reginald de Lacy, have thought for thy towers of Newark, lest the fire of its hearths be flung aloft to the roof-tree.—Take good heed, Milo de Miles, that stranger hands thrust not a deadly sickle into thy harvests betwixt Trent and Humber!—Beware, Guido Baliol, of a mightier hunter in thy forests of Teesdale and Marwood, than ever yet shot at a stag therein! Oh, look to your proper selves, fair Sirs, for, win or lose, this matter is all your own!——”

“ Well!” exclaimed Du Coci, laughing, “if the master-pilot speak sooth, ye are a goodly fleet to sail with on a rough ocean! here be ten chances, methinks, out of a hundred for making harbour, and the remainder ninety for going down headlong! but, courage my hearts! there is *choice*, as the phrase goes! choice betwixt splitting upon the black reef of De Mowbray’s vengeance, or tarrying until the hurricane of his wrath founder the strongest in mid-sea!”

“ Aye,” said the Justiciary, “but thou, Alberic du Coci, thou, of all men, art the *worst* adrift upon its troubled waters! come wrack, come roar, thou hast but one poor plank be-

twixt thy feeble body and the foaming brine.
Why, good Sir Alberic, thou art here, I take it, with thine exchequer upon thy back ; to wit, the cost of a frayed hauberk, and cloak. These, and the fag-end of a soldier's life, thou hast to lose, when it shall please Heaven, we will not say ‘when it shall please De Mowbray ;’ though, as Montgomery says, there *hath* gone up an oath ‘from the fair aisles of Durham,’ what then ? He that sleeps under lifted steel shall awake with his throat cut ; up and be doing ! swear thou against the swearer, and let the seven weeks' end show which must be forsworn ! *Ne feriare feri, Sir Alberic !* or, in less clerkly phrase, Strike ! lest thou be stricken ! Banded with these around thee, there is good hope that thou shalt smite the smiter. If not, and thou wilt stand *alone*, why—so.. I do commend thee to sanctuary with all speed ! and well if the very horns of the altar keep thee from the twang of that deadly bow which dealt but yesterday upon the brave De Waleric.”

“Now, by my patron saint !” exclaimed Du Cœi, “this is such garbage as may fit the maw of the kite, but makes the gorge of the eagle

rise in abhorring scorn ! My Lord Justiciary ! and thou, Earl of Shrewsbury ! and good Knights all ! hear ! and have done. Stretch me the hand of fellowship, and I will grasp it with as bold and true a palm as the best He amongst ye that sees a thousand lances flash under his spread banner ! but deal not with me as with a craven boy, that will not leap the ditch until the horns of the bull are like to hurl him across it ! Think ye I have such terror of De Mowbray, that, for the fool's wages of little promise and much threat, I will at once bind me body and soul to the jealous quarrel of others ? By St. Jude, ye have run a tilt at the wrong quintain ! show me who swears against my life, and, if my hand keep not my head, off with them both, say I. Nay, I will take part, too, in the feud of others, if I be freely minded, and strike with those who strike fairly ; but, in the way of ~~FEAR~~, look ye, I care not one poor bezant for the best league against Northumbria's Earl that may be patched up out of the pride and hatred of all Britain, backed by the Marshal and the Constable, and headed by the great Justiciary. And touching mine exchequer," continued the

Knight with growing animation, “ let me tell ye, noble sirs, ye have hearkened to a lying spirit in that too. I have reaped, in this goodly field of Winchester, a golden harvest, with a peculiar sickle ; and garnered into my coffers that which shall fence me from the winter of evil-hap this many a day. I am now in plight to clap into mailed coat and steel saddle some fifty gallants, light-hearted and heavy-handed ; as jolly a plump of spears as ever rode under a bachelor’s pennon. Backed with such especial prancers, I care not, I, for Baron or Earl,

“ *Mohun or Bohun,
Mandeville or Mandeville.* ”

“ It shall go hard, in these stirring times, but we will find enough to win and wear, although the fag-end (as ye have phrased it) of a soldier’s life be spun out until, like the gallant Siward of Northumberland, we fear to die like brutes in their littered stalls, rather than warriors in steel harness !”

“ Oh, well said, well said !” exclaimed Flambard, with admiration, half-feigned, half-real, and glancing his eye around, as if to challenge a corresponding feeling from the rest ; “ well and

gallantly said ! and I would, for thy sake, good Sir Alberic, and for that of thy brave followers (to say nought of De Waleric, who is past praying for), that the stout Saxon ye have named had been Earl of the villainous North even to this day ; but yet," he added, as if correcting himself, "what prate we of De Mowbray and his oath ? Enough have we heard to warrant us that Alberic du Coci will laugh at both ; aye, though his pennon fluttered in Tyne breezes, within bow-shot of the towers that yesternoon were robbed of their Constable with such a bloody hand."

" By St. Mary," cried the adventurer, " I 'll tell ye what—I would it were *my* hap to leap into De Waleric's saddle, foully emptied as it was ! It would content me well to have those towers for the speedy winning and safe holding. If with three words from the king's lip I did not rend the prey from the spoiler, I would to heaven bright steel might never more come in my clutch ! "

To this point had the conversation been for the most part tending, and upon this, as upon the common centre of all interests, it now

steadily revolved. As, however, the continued dialogue by which Du Coci secured at last a promise of the constableship of Newcastle, was of that bargain-making character, at all times better glanced at than detailed, we shall endeavour to put a timely curb upon our *colloquial* propensities. In brief, then, a treaty of alliance, offensive and defensive was now formed between Du Coci and the faction opposed to his potent adversary of Northumberland.

Little difficulty was experienced by the contracting powers in adjusting the terms of their league. Upon the strength of the King's previous promise to Montgomery, the good knight, Sir Alberic du Coci was assured of immediate installation in the Castellanship of the New Castle, with full grant of such rights, and privilege, and adjacent territory, as heretofore had been annexed to the possession of the fortress. Promise also was given of aid and rescue in the event of his being besieged by a power of such superiority as to render long defence impracticable. Upon the part of the Constable elect it was engaged that he should diligently and faithfully discharge all duties of watch and

ward—cornage and castle-guard; and, with hand and heart, by night and by day—against force or fraud, the devil or De Mowbray, keep, hold, and defend the said towers, then and for evermore. This was the basis: but there were minor articles, which, as Du Coci plainly saw, involved much of the service especially, though covertly, demanded from him in return for his northern settlement. Their main scope was a poor and busy subserviency, on the part of the Knight, to all purposes, pre-arranged or subsequent, of the faction now strengthening itself against Robert de Mowbray; including such a system of espial upon that nobleman as the frank-hearted adventurer, although not caring to boggle at there and then, resolved, in his secret soul, to modify very materially when once fairly seated in his Castle on Tyne bank.

The stress laid by the Marshal and the Justiciary upon De Waleric's death, and their unscrupulous assumption of the crime having been committed by De Mowbray did not escape his observation; but he forbore to assert his own well-grounded conviction of its injustice, having, by this time, seen and heard enough to apprise

him not only of the general state of parties in England, but of the peculiar use to which Montgomery and De Tunbridge had, from the first, agreed to put the chance of De Waleric's death. He foresaw equally that an attempt would be made to substantiate the charge before the King, and that the only circumstance upon which defence could be grounded efficiently, was that of the person branded as De Mowbray's agent, being, at the instant of discovery, found manacled to the earth in utter helplessness. He knew that the attestation of this could alone rebut the unjust charge, and, however foreign to the purpose of the confederates, he knew also that to such attestation he had solemnly pledged himself to Cœur d'Acier.

It was not therefore the cue of Sir Alberic to express disbelief of De Mowbray's guilt, since, to do so, was like throwing in the way of his patrons his personal knowledge of the transaction, and suggesting to them, as it were, the expediency of wringing from him some pledge that neither his own evidence, nor that of his retainer, should tend to establish such a fact in the presence of the Sovereign.

He determined, therefore, upon remaining prudentially silent, and to trust to his own good fortune for avoiding both horns of the dilemma —for maintaining, at once, faith with Raymond, and good fellowship with his new associates.

All this was ‘very fine,’ but whether equally practicable remained for proof. The party, indeed, suspected too strongly his knowledge of the only circumstance bearing against them; and were determined upon having something like assurance, that he should not render it a stumbling block in their immediate paths.

The imperfect recollection of De Tunbridge, however, rendered it politic rather to *allude* to than to *assert*, and the matter was thus adroitly insinuated by the Justiciary.

“And now, gentle Sir Alberic, what remains but that we procure thee to be empowered, and accredited ‘par lettre et par saisine,’ as the law bath it, and pray Heaven for thy safe journey northward? Upon my life!” he added, as if with a sudden touch of generous indignation, “’twere fitting the King knew in how great peril his liege vassals betake them to the green-wood upon their lawful occasions. *Thou, Du*

Coci, in especial, hast cause to wish that this monstrous slaughter which De Mowbray hath done were fully proven against him; and, I take shame to tell thee, there are who, for base lucre, or yet baser *fear*, prate even of the serviceable villain who hath stricken for him (this subtle Raymond) as though, forsooth, in their vast charity, they saw not that his guilt stands out gross as a mountain at broad noon! Now, he that shall meet with such a varlet, and cuts not out his tongue for its villainous wagging, by Mary-mother, I will hold him for a false-hearted slave, a fawner and a foot-licker of De Mowbray, and an evil-wisher to all in this noble and knightly presence. What sayest thou, Montgomery?"

"Aye, by St. Hugh!" answered that ungentle personage, "be he knight or groom, custrel or squire. Du Coci, thy varlet with the unbelieving visage saw and heard somewhat in the forest yesterday—see that *his* memory take not a haggard's flight, lest it mar thine own falconry, now and for ever."

"O, well bethought!" said Flambard, "bid

him remember what priests say of the tongue,
'*it slayeth!*' "

"Aye, but ye wot little of Nicholas de L'Epée," said Sir Alberic, "to speak of him in *this* wise. Foot and hand I have some say over, but his tongue is no vassal of mine. He keeps *that* under his own banner, to ride far or near as he lists."

"He shall list to keep a stiff rein upon it for once," said Flambard, "or it may chance to gallop him to the shores of Limbo-lake. Bid him choose, Sir Alberic, betwixt the tying-up of his tongue and the hanging up of his body."

"And look to it with good heed," said Montgomery, anxious to *clench* the matter efficiently, "look to it, I say, Sir Alberic, or, by my faith, there comes no constableship of Tyne-castle upon *thy* shoulders, *that* I promise thee. It were sorry journeying thither only to have thy four quarters strung to its four gates, and thy head stuck upon its topmost tower."

"A black truth!" answered the knight; "but the tools are yet unforged that shall do such service upon Alberic du Coci! and that

I swear to ye by the hammer and anvil of St. Cuthbert."

"Swear it not with white lips, Du Coci," rejoined the Earl.

"I will bite them off, first," replied the adventurer; "and they shall laugh thrice and again at bolder threats than these, ere they be once pecked at by any crow that flies over the marches, west or north, whether its eyrie be in the towers of Bamborough or of Shrewsbury."

And thus, after a few conciliatory flourishes from the Premier, ended and dissolved the secret council of Wolvesley. Heartily weary, for the most part, of matters so uncongenial, the members gladly dispersed to amusements almost as various as those of the "grand infernal peers" who "forth in order came" from the infernal senate-house of Pandemonium. The Marshal and the Constable betook themselves to the ramparts, to criticise a new fortification; De Lacy and others to the chace, or the calm conflicts of the chess-board; De Tunbridge to a renovating toilet before again addressing Matilda; Du Coci to an admonitory interview with Raymond; and the subtle Justiciary him-

self, first, to lay commands upon his creature, the abbot of St. Grimbald's, finally, to arrange, in the royal castle, for a sort of inquest in the presence of the monarch, immediately upon his return from the chace. In consequence of which the body of De Waleric was removed thither from the cathedral; and Raymond of the heart of steel arrested almost upon the very spot where we left him at the close of our last chapter.

CHAPTER III.

"Are ye a man?"

Macbeth.

RAYMOND was as much astounded by the suddenness of his arrest, as if it had not been that very thing of all others which he had most reason to apprehend. Upon the verge of this pit-fall, indeed, he had trod blindfold from the moment of entering Winchester. Treachery had placed him within the eye and the grasp of Flambard, whose policy dogged his steps with never-sleeping espial, and delayed only to fling the net in the hope that, by observing with whom the emissary of De Mowbray held intercourse, some guess might be formed as to the connexions of his haughty master. The moment, however, was now at hand when Raymond was to be rendered subservient to a bolder purpose; and there were at once security and readiness within the four walls of a dungeon.

The space between Nunna Mynstre and the Castle afforded sufficient leisure for a reflection, now too late, upon the extreme likelihood of such an occurrence as his present seizure; as well as an anticipation of its probable results. As to the *cause*—although his guards sullenly refused all information—even had he been so inapprehensive as not to guess the truth, enough would have been indicated when, within a little distance of his prison-house, they passed the remains of De Waleric, stretched upon a bier, which four men bore slowly along in the same direction.

“Ah, gallant Knight!” said Raymond, internally, “an evil journey was that of yesterday both for thee and me!”

They entered within the Castle-barriers by a barbican or fortified outpost, of great strength, communicating, from its inner portal, by a ponderous drawbridge, over a moat of corresponding depth and breadth, with the western or main-entrance to the whole range of fortification. This (we mean the entrance) was a massive gateway, flanked by two square towers, and strengthened also by others of like struc-

ture and bulk, occurring at short intervals along the walls.

Of the area within, the Keep, or Donjon, occupied the north-west angle, upon an elevated square of about a hundred feet. It was of prodigious strength and thickness, and only to be approached by a second range of defences, walls, turrets, and ditches, which encompassed it upon the west and south sides, forming an inner ballium or glacis, from which a foe who had penetrated the *outward* wards might yet be annoyed and repulsed by the garrison. The bridges and gateway which gave ingress to this ballium, were, like those of the first, facing the west; but the main entrance to the Keep required the prisoner and his guards to turn the left-hand angle before it presented itself.

Under different auspices, had the gallant Squire been assured that he was about to enter the strongest fortress in Britain, he would, no doubt, have scanned, with military satisfaction, the fulness and ingenuity of defence displayed by the whole structure. He would have admired the height and massiveness of its walls and towers: the well-ordered disposition of its

approaches ; the depth of its vast fosses, running a hundred feet below the base of the Keep ; and the gigantic proportions of that huge building itself, flanked with a massy tower at every angle, and with a fifth, lowering over the entrance, which, with the added terrors of its yawning *graff*—its projecting machicolation for the pouring down of missiles and melted ore—its tremendous portcullis, and enormous gates of trebled oak, seemed to frown defiance and scorn upon a besieger.

But Raymond's “planet-ascendant” of the hour shed no influence favourable to such speculation ; and we suspect that in the revulsion of feeling natural to one who, from the day-dream of early passion is suddenly wrenched into the harsh world of realities, revulsion, too, deepened by the insolence of his conductors and the hootings of the mob, he was utterly forgetful of all military association. It is not probable that he was alive even to the honour of being incarcerated in the same prison—nay, it might be in the same dungeon, where, at no very remote day, an archbishop had ceased to breathe and suffer. We allude to the last of the Saxon

Primates, Stigand of Canterbury, immured in that grim fortress by William the Conqueror, until the Conqueror's conqueror came to his relief.

After some delay in the court of guard, Raymond was consigned to a warder, in whose hand a lighted lamp indicated the nature of his further route. From the north-east tower, a descent of steps (the ruins were visible not many years ago) brought them into a narrow passage which led to the dungeons beneath. Long, low, and dark was this corridor of the mansion of Tyranny, exhibiting, at intervals, on either side, the low-browed entrances to those chambers of misery of which it was the fitting approach. At one of these the warder stopped, directing upon its blackened oak and ponderous fastenings the feeble glimmer of his lamp, and uttering, in no silver tones, the single word, "Behold!"

Raymond's sagacity was at fault ; but, in the next instant, another voice, deeper and sterner, murmured with like brevity, a monosyllable which seemed half inquiry—half exclamation, "*This?*"

"*This,*" answered the Warder. It was then

that a chance turn of the lamp enabled Raymond to discover that, since, or during their descent, they had been joined and accompanied, unobserved thus far, by a third person. He wore the gown and hood of a pilgrim, but was too closely enveloped in them to admit of any guess at age, rank, or profession; unless some indication of the first was perceptible in a slight stoop of the body, which, however, might be attributable merely to the low roof of the passage. In the next moment conjecture became yet more difficult; for the figure, dropping on both knees, and bending its head to the very earth, assumed an attitude of deep and solemn prostration, his clasped hands resting against the dungeon door.

The warder scowled with mingled surprise and contempt upon this act of enthusiasm, of whatever nature, and, passing to the door of the next cell, applied the "open-sesame" of a huge key, at the same time bidding the fettered Raymond "enter, and pray, too, if he listed. As well kneel like a monk," he added, "as wail like a child."

"Something better," replied the youth, step-

ping firmly into the murky chamber appointed for him, "whether in palace or prison. Who, I pray you, kneels yonder?"

"Would'st thou be shiven?" said the official, with true professional indirectness of response; then, without waiting an answer to his counter-question, he muttered—

"I have no warrant for such grace, and must first lock and bolt. It will be time, Sir Springald, to call in a shaveling a brief hour before death."

So saying, he made fast the chains, which hung upon his prisoner, to a ring socketed in the pavement, and, muttering the old saw, "fast bind, fast find," withdrew from the cell, locking, barring, and bolting, according to usage immemorial in such cases.

As the lamp vanished, the gloom of the dungeon sank heavily upon the spirit of its inmate; and, for a moment, it seemed to him as if, even in the random words of the gaoler, he could trace an angury of approaching doom. It was the first grasp which the icy fingers of Captivity had ever laid upon him, and the blood crept in colder current from his heart than he had before experienced. The very silence which deep-

ened around, as the echoes of the closing door died away, seemed revolting to him, and he listened, with an eagerness strange even to himself, to catch the receding footsteps of the wander, as that ungracious functionary retrode the dismal vestibule which conducted again to pure air and the blessed day-beam, from the damp and gloom of those living sepulchres.

Other sounds, however, than the expected ones, fell upon his ear—the murmuring of voices; deadened and confused, but yet audible enough for the hearer's certainty of their utterance. They continued for a little while, and were then accompanied by sounds which Raymond half imagined to be the grating of his dungeon door slowly and cautiously re-opened; while, as if to confirm the supposition, a faint light gleamed at the moment upon one of the walls. The length of his chain, however, enabled him, with out-stretched hands, to ascertain that he was deceived in this, although the voices seemed even more distinct, and the paly light still flickered at intervals upon the walls and roof. Presently the grating murmurs were resumed, and still resembled, to his ear, the

rest-imposed movement of lock, and bolt, and hinge. The dim light then died entirely away, the human accents were heard no more, and gloom and silence, equally profound, sank down upon the prison-vault and its perplexed inmate.

So strangely had the evidences of sight and hearing been opposed to those of touch, that, for some time, Raymond found it difficult to trust the latter. The gloomy novelty of his situation tended to fill him with vague presentiments and morbid forebodings. He imaged to himself the re-opened door admitting either an assassin to stab him in his slumbers, or a dark listener, intent to wring from the least passing thought, to which, in his dejection and solitude he might give utterance, matter of guilty avowal and self-accusal. Again, therefore, with extended hand, he touched the walls on every side, and again took, from the dismal traverse, assurance that no human being divided its bleak possession with him. Natural firmness and intrepidity then began to make head against the diseased sallies of imagination. He remembered the kneeling stranger without—his, doubtless, were the tones; and it was not difficult to suppose him some

the forfeited blood of yet another of the evil-fortuned Earls of Northumberland !

The suggestion was terrible to Raymond. His thoughts wandered back through the maze of evil chances which had involved him in this dilemma, until they rested upon the murder of De Waleric ; and then, in the bitterness of his soul, he could not refrain from imprecating, aloud, a malediction upon the Saxon assassins, as the primary causes of his distress.

The words were scarcely uttered, when a voice said in reply,

“ Curse yet again—and deeper ! that it may rebound the heavier upon thy malignant self !”

Brave to very enthusiasm, and at least as free from superstition as most of his contemporaries, the youth was yet far from proof against the preternatural aptness and suddenness of such a response—

“ He started up with more of fear
Than if an armed host were near—
God of my fathers ! what is here ?”

It was the Invisible of the forest !

How transported within those gloomy and

guarded confines, at least by any earthly medium, it was not merely in vain to conjecture, but, for Raymond, in the full assurance of perfect solitude, absolutely impossible to conceive.

"Said I not," resumed the inscrutable visitor, "that the fetters of the tyrant Norman would fall heavily upon thee, thou despiser of the Saxon?"

"Avoid thee, demon! in the name of God!" exclaimed the youth. "No warrant hast thou from heaven or mine own sins to haunt and disturb me thus!"

"It is a lying spirit that tells thee so," answered the voice. "From thine own lips came the warrant, when, even now, they cursed with a grievous curse the very race of whose blood I have already warned thee a portion runs in thy malignant veins."

"False as the hell that sends thee! What knowest *thou* of the high race from whence I spring? If aught, then dost thou know that their pure Norman strain had scorned alliance with the vanquished Saxon!"

"Poor worm!" said the Invisible; "proud in blind ignorance! It was the vanquished

Saxon—vanquished, indeed, in one unhappy field, but victors until then in many a fight ! It was the Saxon, sprung from a line whose chiefs were mighty upon earth a thousand years before the robber Normans could boast them lords of one poor scanty rood—Aye ! ere they dubbed them, in their barbarous gallies, ‘ Kings of the Deep,’ whose billows foamed their laughter of the vaunt ! I say, again, proud boy ! it was the Saxon that scorned alliance with thy Norman sires. Yes ! from the hour when a degenerate woman, feeble and basely-minded, shamed not to wed with one of the accursed race, whose hands were crimsoned with her country’s blood, whose fetters cankered into the souls of her crushed sire and kinsmen, in vaults and cells and dungeon-fastnesses, beneath the very turrets once their own—even from that hour, I tell thee, Stripling, a spirit went abroad, subtle and sleepless, devoted and avenging, to wreak, through many a coming year of wretchedness, the Saxon’s wrong on his perfidious child ! on her and hers—husband and husband’s kin—children and children’s child for evermore. Offspring of that detested union, for such thou

art, although the stern De Waleric, to whom thy sire abandoned thee, whispered it not in thy young ear, I—even I—am that avenging spirit! Ever, from the cradle upward, mine eye hath been upon thee, to mark if in *thy* veins the blood of the Norman mingled in peaceful current with the Saxon; and now—even in this vault of tyranny I come to warn thee, an hour of trial is at hand. Yet but a little space, and he that is tyrant over tyrants shall summon thee to lay hand upon De Waleric's clay, and pronounce unto him what manner of hunters struck to the earth that lordly quarry. Fain would his grasping hand wring from the miserable 'Hundred' where 'twas done, a mighty Wergild;* but, if from *thy* lips the oppressor shall snatch his plea for such extortion—if thou shalt strive to charge upon the Saxon this deed of vengeance——”

“I!” interrupted Raynaond, vehemently, “and shall I not! Fiend with the voice of man! or man with the aid of fiends! whichever thou art, begone! thou temptest me in

* *Wergild*. The Saxon term for “the price of the head,” that is, the head of one murdered.

vain ! were every demon that thou or thine hast league with, banded against me, I would avouch, fully and fearlessly, what I beheld and heard ! ”

“ Perish then in thy malignancy ! ” exclaimed the voice ; “ this I foresaw and doubted not—and yet, for this—this only have I tarried—to cleanse from my devoted spirit the last poor scruple of human infirmity which clogged its purpose. Soon shall the mission branded upon my soul be all fulfilled ! By me came vengeance upon the Sire, deep and enduring as the Saxon’s wrong—remorse and exile, and a nameless death ! by me the wretched Mother timeless fell, victim of her fierce lord’s unfounded jealousy ! by me the son—— ”

“ Accursed ! ” exclaimed the prisoner, goaded almost to phrenzy by these vaunts of horror, referring, however vaguely, to the doom of his parents ; “ begone, in the holiest name ! or let me grapple with thee ! ”

And, thus saying, he threw himself in the direction of the voice, violently, and with extended arms, to the full stretch of his chain ; but the cold masonry of the dungeon alone encountered his grasp ! Again, and yet again,

with the energy of desperation, he traversed its gloomy bounds, and again was fearfully convinced that nothing of human mould could be within them, saving only his haunted and tormented self !

He paused, and—motionless—almost breathless—listened for a renewal of the conference, but not a whisper broke upon the profound stillness; nothing was audible except the rapid beating of his own heart. Then, fevered by the unnatural change, he called aloud—he even shouted defiance to his mysterious visitant ; but that impalpable disclaimer, either having departed, spirit-like as he came, or choosing to mock with obdurate silence, the feelings he had exasperated, uttered not a single word in reply.

CHAPTER IV.

"Which of ye have done this?

Thou cans't not say 'twas I that did it."

Macbeth.

"EXISTENCE," says the poet, "depends on time, but actions are our epocha." Actions, indeed, are to time what objects are to space; these respective media marking out, for human cognizance and purposes, the one with eras and post-obits—the other with boundaries and set stages. Of both, without some mechanic agency, our estimation is vague and trustless. The petty mile which the guess of a merry heart pares down to a furlong, the leaden apprehension of the sorrowful stretches out to a league; while the same modicum of day or night that light-winged Pleasure flutters over as a span, Affliction drags faintingly through as if an age. But of all mortal guessers at the lapse of time, the solitary inmate of a dungeon is incomparably the worst.

The beggar, trudging over a plain, cannot, like the motley gentleman in Ardenne Forest, "pull a dial from his poke," yet, marking the place which the blessed sun holds in heaven, he too, perhaps, "says very wisely, it is ten o'clock." The ploughman also takes assurance by a like natural process, and nicks the savoury hour of noon without detriment to the culinary toils of "neat-handed Phillis;" while the home-keeping fathers of the hamlet, when the disordered church horologe rests from its labours, watch the shadow of the steeple upon their white-washed gables, and are content with its simple dialship. But, for the dungeon-dweller, there is nothing save the wearisome succession of his own wearisome thoughts. He has no "coign of vantage" for a single conjecture to nestle upon. He goes not "by the moon and seven stars," like Sir John Falstaff; no, nor by Phœbus, "that wandering knight so fair," and has, in fact, less reason than even the fat hero of Eastcheap to be "so superfluous as to demand the time of the day." All is to him vacuum and monotony—an ocean at once stagnant and illimitable; without shore or tide, billow or

breeze. Day has to him no sign, and night no token; there is nothing to whisper an admonitory “tempus fugit,” except only the periodical advent of his black loaf and his muddy pitcher.

Happily for our friend Raymond, his term of durance was not sufficiently protracted to render him a full illustration of all this. But even the few hours (we will not specify their number) which really elapsed between the closing and re-opening of his prison-door, he found, upon their termination, had deceived him in their painful lapse.

At length came the mandate of liberation; not muttered by the lips of the peevish warder, but growled from the deep chest and leathern lungs of two brawny men-at-arms, in whose bellicose presence that humbler official hid his diminished head, as the blinking taper which he bore “paled its ineffectual beams” in the glare of the torches carried by those intruders upon his department. As the red and smoky illumination flashed into every corner of the cell, Raymond could neither refrain from glancing his eye keenly around, nor check something of renewed surprise when nothing was revealed in

the unwonted lustre which could suggest the most strained solution of his enigma. Roof, walls, and pavement were alike naked and silent.

Another scene, however, and of a different interest, now awaited him, in which although a human and seemingly distinct aspect was presented, the agency was, perhaps, little less occult and threatening.

Some of the fetters with which he had been loaded were struck off, and the guards conducted him to the Castle hall, a vast apartment, nearly ninety feet in length, and of which the lofty roof was supported by carved work of prodigious boldness, resting on ponderous brackets. In the centre, upon a bier raised about four feet from the pavement, lay the ostensible cause of his summons thither,—the lifeless body of De Waleric. It was so disposed as to exhibit to the first glance of a spectator the violence which had driven the spirit from its tenement; a sort of shroud or pall being thrown over the lower parts, while the breast and head displayed, in open ghastliness, the wounds inflicted by the arrows of the assassins, in two of which the

deadly shafts yet remained where they had been so fatally planted.

Grouped around this revolting object, were many knights and nobles, amongst whom Raymond was not slow to distinguish those who were most likely to take an active part in the inquest thus prepared for. He saw Montgomery—De Tunbridge—De Miles—De Lacy, and others of the faction opposed to De Mowbray. These clustered together, and conversed apart; while, on the other side of the bier, stood the Earl of Chester, his powerful vassal Nigel of Halton, and some subordinate dignitaries of the Palatinate. Other, and less important, or with respect to our narrative, less interesting groups, there were, all occupied with the same engrossing subject. Two individuals stood singly—apart from the rest and from each other; the Justiciary Flambard, and the kinsman of the dead, William de Aldery, upon whose countenance, ordinarily sad enough, the shadows of despondency were now trebly deepened.

Raymond was constrained by his escort to pause at the extremity of the hall, but his

appearance was not unnoticed by the assemblage ; and it may be questioned whether grim smiles and glances of dark significance would have been the worst of his greeting, had not the King himself almost immediately entered, accompanied by those who had been his partners in the hunt. Like "Amurath, the Sultan of the East," Rufus had returned from an unsuccessful chase; not without some portion of the evil mood consequent upon such disappointments ; although it was perhaps subjected to a more powerful will than that of the oriental monarch.

He paused on beholding the assembled nobles, and, for an instant, regarded them with something like displeased surprise ; but, instantly detecting the cause, strode gloomily to the head of the bier, threw a burning glance upon the features of the dead, and, transferring it in rapid succession to every living face around him, broke out, at length, in accents not loud, but tremulous with passion—

"Now, by ———!"

It seemed as if no oath or imprecation of corresponding terror and malignancy suggested itself ; or the exasperated monarch was strangely

enabled to forbear its utterance. Turning to Flambard, he merely said, in tones of fearfully constrained calmness,

“ Who hath done this ? ”

“ God and our Lady know, my royal Liege,” answered Ranulph, “ not I.”

“ Not thou ! ” iterated the King fiercely, as if grasping the first pretext for resuming the violence he had restrained—

“ By God and our Lady both, Sir Justiciary ! but right fitting it is that thou *didst* know somewhat and that speedily ! if not, what makes this carrion here ? why cumbers it the very threshold of my palace ? I care not, I, for the poor clay ! but by the splendour of heaven ! he that in the peaceful forest hath changed a gallant knight into this livid clod—he that hath transformed Hugo de St. Waleric into this grinning and chap-fallen ghastliness, if he draw breath in realm of mine, let him beware the penalty ! millions of treasure shall not redeem it ! I will have blood for blood ! Give me but the shadow of a proof, and I will nail his severed quarters to castle-gates, east, west, north, and south, and set his murderous head upon the topmost turret

of Tyne Castle! Thou wilt not gainsay the justice of *that* sentence, Lord Abbot, ha? there is *holy* warrant for *that*, methinks, if it be lacking for him who slaughters the King's deer!"

"Woe be to him," replied the Abbot, "who putteth the blood of war upon the girdle that is about his loins in peace! he shall flee from the iron weapon, and the bow of steel shall strike him through!"

"A false prophet, Sir Priest!" rejoined the monarch—"He shall not die the death of a gallant buck, but that of a skulking felon!"

"The buck must be chased, my Liege," said Flambard, "and the felon caught; or your grace shall have bootless hunger either for vengeance or venison."

"Didst ever hear of a King that fasted for lack of either? if thou didst, it was not William of England! speak! speak ye that can—speak one and all! Where was this mangling of God's image done? who found the corpse? who saw? who heard? who is suspect? and why? Spare not for name or fame! the proudest in this presence should not——Oh, fair and ~~soothly~~! is De Aldéry here?" his eye, at that mo-

ment, glancing for the first time upon the Knight, “why ! ’tis most fitting ! what evil cloud hath shadowed him so long ? stand forth, Sir Knight, the kinsman of the slain hath vengeance for his legacy. Let us hear *thee* touching this damned deed. *Thou* hast not kept the murdered clay uncoffined only to thrust it in mine eyes, and say, ‘Got wot, I cannot tell who did it ?’—*Thou* art not such a driveller, or, by the light of heaven ! the blood of your dishonoured race is colder in thy living veins than in De Waleric’s lifeless trunk, or where it reddens the forest turf !”

“ Upon that turf,” answered De Aldery, “would I pour out my own to its last drop, could such sacrifice avail me to bring down vengeance upon his murderers. But Hell mantles its own until the time is ;—I know not, and I suspect not, who is guilty.”

“ Why,” said the King, with a fierce scorn, “then get thee hence, and *dream* of vengeance, ‘until the time is.’—We will *suspect*, aye, and *prove* too, without thee.”

“ I go, Sir King,” replied the insulted Noble, his pallid cheek flushing with indignation, “but not without the relics of my kinsman ; when

your Justiciary hath done with *them*, I cumber your proud halls no more."

"The better," answered Rufus, "for them and thee. Meanwhile, by St. Luke's face ! he that will name the murderer of De Waleric, let him in the same breath name his heart's dearest wish, and, were it the tythe of my realm, he has it !—What ! silent all ?—Oh, well bethought ! there are amongst ye, aye, even as ye stand here, some that were evil wishers to De Waleric. Look to it, Sirs !—"

"He that hath a black thought of Hugo de Montgomery," said the Marshal, knitting his heavy brows, "let him avouch it."

"Go to, sir Earl ! I suspect not thee. Nor thee, Hugh of Chester ; but I bethink me, De Miles, there was but hollow love 'twixt the dead man and *thee*.—And thou, De Lacy, *thou*, I say, hast, in mine own hearing, wished De Waleric deeper in hell than Dives that was clad in purple —look that there be no blot upon *your* shields, fair sirs !"

"It is evil mood with your grace," said the Constable, "when De Miles is suspect of mur-

der, and, by holy St. Paul ! when there shall come such charge from other lips, it shall be met in far other wise !—There !” he added, throwing down his mailed gauntlet, “ there is my gage, and let him lift it who holds that the slaughter of De Waleric hath flung one speck upon the shield of Milo de Miles.”

“ And under favour of my Sovereign, whom passion hath parcel-blinded,” said De Lacy, “ there too, lies mine ! If there be any here to lift it in such quarrel, I will abide the issue, on foot or horseback. Methinks a Christian knight may wish the man that he hates deeper in hell than ever was fish in ocean, without drawing a secret bow in the greenwood to send him thither.”

There was a brief interval of gloomy silence, in which the gages of defiance lay undisturbed upon the pavement; the offended appellants, scowling each upon his own, as if in sullen expectation of the bold hand that should dare to lift them. At length Flambard gave the signal to a lay brother of St. Grimbald’s, attendant upon the Abbot, who, with slow and reluctant

hand, picked up the ominous pledges, each by a finger-end, as a man might lift a speckled toad by the foot.

“Take back your gage, my lord of Hereford,” said the Justiciary—“and thou, De Lacy, thine. None here disputes your nobleness; nor is it meet that, for a hasty word of his royal lip, the King’s lieges should dash their gauntlets upon his palace-floor.—Touching this evil-entreated knight, upon whose body slaughter is indeed shamefully manifest, it is most true that God and the forest shadows were alone privy to his destruction; but yet, by heedful note of circumstance, we may direct, if not the hand of proof, the speaking finger of most shrewd suspicion—”

“Suspicion! Lord Justiciary!” interrupted Hugh Lupus suddenly—“Why, this is groping at broad noon! Whose flock is ravaged, and the wolf acquit? Who sees the scattered plumage of the heron, and doubts the robber-hawk hath gorged the flesh? Who finds a Norman slaughtered, and holds the Saxon guiltless?”

“Marry, for one, I, Ranulph Flambard!”

answered the Justiciary.—“ Since, in this evil world, shepherds have hanged their dogs for wolf-like trespass ; eagles have done the felon-work of hawks ; and last, not least, *Normans have murdered Normans*. Look, good my Liege, and noble peers, here stands, if his own story be sooth, a Norman, who, while the blood yet flowed from De Waleric’s wounds—aye, ere the murdered heart had well ceased beating, was seized within a lance-length of the deed, cowering most felon-wise amidst the coppice. If ye would hear a tale fit for a monk’s chronicle, or a glee-man’s jest, hearken, with good heed, to the Squire of Robert de Mowbray !”

“ Ho !” exclaimed, (or, rather shouted,) the Monarch, all sense of regal propriety lapsing in the fierce pleasure of finding at length an undisputed channel for his wrath. “ Have hither De Mowbray’s villain with all speed !”—then, as Raymond was brought forward—“ Aye ! thou—thou, caitiff, ! thou, I say, knowest more than enough of this handy-work of hell—and we will have *truth* from thee, if time and torture can drag it forth !—Where is thy traitor-lord ?

first answer that.—Canst thou not speak? Villain and slave, hast thou no joints in those irreverent knees?"

"Your Grace's villains and slaves," answered the youth, with perfect firmness, "have crippled them with fetters. Strike me these trinkets off," (pointing to his chains,) "and I will kneel.—Ask me of the good Knight and faithful Earl De Mowbray, and I will answer."

The determination and boldness of this response filled all present with amazement. Even the rage of the King was equalled by his surprise, and, it was not until after a moment's singular pause that he broke forth again:—

"Now, by the splendour of Heaven! to lack both beard and brain, thou art the most frontless and audacious traitor that ever yet stood in the presence of a king! But we will supple thy joints to purpose, I promise thee; rack first, and gibbet after! fire and steel for a space, and then the cord of the hangman! Confess, caitiff!"— and, as he spoke, the choleric monarch seized the vest of the accused, with something between a grasp and a blow, and dragged him a few paces towards the bier.—

“ Confess that thou and others, thy fellow-butchers, have done this cursed deed, to pleasure the great traitor De Mowbray ! ha ?”—

“ Let go my throat, Sir King !” said Raymond, with the same unshrinking firmness as before—“ Is *this* the bearing of a Monarch ?—Is *this* done like William of England ?”

It was impossible not to be struck with the dignity, the self-possession and moral intrepidity of one, who, with respect to the mature personages around him, was little more than a boy. Even the enraged King felt the power of the appeal, and withdrew the unworthy gripe he had laid upon him ; but it was with a gesture of corresponding violence ; flinging the youth from him with a force which it required some strength and adroitness to avoid staggering under. Cœur d’Acier, indeed, saw that the crisis of his fate was at hand, and that the next word of the tyrant might be a mandate for his instant destruction. The thought is dreadful, even to the bravest, and, although his courage remained unbroken, it took a tinge of solemnity and enthusiasm, which evinced the pressure it sustained. Kneeling by the side of the bier, he

laid one hand upon the bosom of the dead, lifted the clay-cold fingers with the other, and pressed them firmly to his lips for several moments ; then, looking upwards, without a change of position, he said in deep, clear tones :—

“ God ! just and terrible ! eternal and all-seeing ! Thou who gavest a spirit to this clay, and didst behold by whose murderous hand it was expelled, HEAR and ATTEST ! if *mine* were that accursed one—or if by glance, or sign, or word, or thought, I was consenting to the slaughter, give, I beseech thee, to those that even now thirst for my blood, a token that they may pour it forth like water, guiltless of such tyranny as, *but* for that, will cry aloud from earth to thy dread footstool !”

There was a profound silence during, and for some time after, this solemn adjuration. Some fixed their eyes upon the impatient features of the King ; others upon the enthusiastic bearing of the accused ; and a few upon the extended limbs of the murdered man, as if half expecting that the Deity thus fearfully appealed to would manifest, by some immediate and visible token, the guilt or innocence of the appellant.

"There comes no voice from the judgment of God," resumed the latter—"shall I yet sink under the malice of man? Heaven is silent—what more from Earth or Hell?"

"Look," said De Lacy, "if the wounds bleed not afresh."

"No, by the rood of Tosti!" said Hugh Lupus, "they have bled their last; and I marvel, Lord Justiciary, if there be ought of proof against this springald, that ye allege it not in brief clear wise. He hath well said God brings no charge against him."

"Mark ye, my Liege," whispered Flambard to the King, "how fain Hugh Lupus is to screen De Mowbray"—then, aloud to the Border noble,

"Oh, content you, Sir Earl, we lack no miracles. Even the Lord Abbot here will tell ye that these matters pertain to Caesar, and unto Caesar should be rendered. It was scantily reverent of the youth to cumber the Lord with that which belongs of right to the Lord's anointed. Marry, had the deceased worn cowl and frock, instead of plate and mail—*then* I grant ye; but Heaven cares for its own, and we on earth must have heed to our sinful selves. Look,

then, my liege, ‘in brief clear wise,’ as the Earl saith, thus stands it with the accused:—Certain liegemen of your Grace have, in their forest travel, by sad hap, encountered this most loathly spectacle—this wreck—this purposed wreck of a most noble bark—this broken casket of an invaluable jewel—this ruin of a once right princely fabric—nay, wherefore do I dally thus with words?—this remnant of De Waleric!—De Waleric, the knightly, noble, generous, and good! free hand, warm heart, and never-quailing spirit! Who here so low or lofty that they knew him not? Who here so dull that they remember not? Who here so base that they would not avenge? Great King, he was thy faithful vassal! Nobles and Knights, he was your brother in arms! William de Aldery, he was thy loving kinsman! Will ye not wreak this wrong upon the doer? Will ye not drag this slaughter into day from out the blackest shadows of deep hell? What! have these crimson mouths no voice? no cry? or shall they fester dumb and unavenged in the tomb? gagged with the earth-worm? shut close with rotting clay? Oh, blessed Mother of our Lord! have

thou no prayer for me in my worst need—abandon me on earth to archery like this, and, after death, confess no portion in me, if I—aye ! even I alone, should all else fail—pursue not, with the foot of never-sleeping vengeance, the workers of this deed !

“ My Sovereign Liege ! I charge this slaughter of your vassal, and crave the penalty of blood, first, on yon lurking caitiff, despite his blasphemous appeal to God, whose ear was shut for very wrath ! and, last, but chiefly, upon one far mightier — De Mowbray of Northumberland !”

“ He hath flung himself upon the torrent, sink or swim”—said De Miles to Montgomery. The latter replied with a grisly smile—“ Peace and hark.”

“ I say,” continued the Justiciary, “ and will maintain by proof, that yonder serviceable slave hath slain De Waleric at his lord’s bidding ! I say, that certain of your Grace’s liegemen, but yesterday, beheld him in the forest, backed with armed followers, six archers at the least,—I say, moreover, that certain other lieges of your Grace, *but yesterday*, dragged him from forth

the very thicket in whose shadows this butchery lay—aye, on the very threshold of the slaughter-house—the blood yet flowing warm—the shafts yet quivering in the mark—his fellow-murderers plunging amidst brake and bush, on this hand and on that.—*Then*—then, I say, and *there*, was he surprised? and for the truth hereof, thou, Hugh-le-Loup of Chester—Hugo de Montgomery, thou, Ilbert de Tunbridge, and other of your knightly fellowship, be witness for me, in God's name!—and yet,” continued this fierce pleader, “the unblushing villain dares deny it! dares prate of innocence and false accusal! and lift up voice and hand and eye to God! and forge such lies as even the stomach of all-gorging folly, brutal and blind devourer as she is, rejected with sickened loathing. *He* would not, for an earldom, have lifted finger against De Waleric, he! They met, chance-hap, in the forest, and rode together in all love and peace! Believe it they who have seen fire and water embrace! a Squire of fierce De Mowbray and De Waleric! De Waleric and a creature of De Mowbray's! the bosom-minion—the serviceable parasite of him who, when a traitorous rebel to his Sov-

of the desperate energy that storm-tossed mariners cast their last anchor within hull's length of the lee-breakers.

It was received, as might be expected, with a laugh of scorn ; but not for that did the accused cease to maintain it, or to demand, in corroboration, *their* presence who alone could or would assert his integrity.

"Destroy me not," he exclaimed, "for the wild words of a faction ! have hither the Knight I speak of—he with the device of the Broken Lance ; his name I know not, but thou De Tunbridge, knowest full well who was of the foremost that rode too late to the rescue of De Waleric.—Have hither, I say, that Knight and his retainer.—Upon *their* word will I stake name and fame—life and limb ! If ye deny me this, shame sit upon your crests ! the curse of destroyed innocence shorten thy bloody reign, Sir King ! and black dishonour darken its annals !"

"' *Dæmonium habet*——!'" exclaimed the accommodating Abbot of Newan Mynstre, with upturned eyes—

"—" *et insanit*' holy father," said Flambard, finishing the text ;—then addressing Raymond

once more, “Art thou *fool* as well as knave ? the Knight of the Broken Lance hath ridden afar off, to take what adventure God sends him. Verily there is evil abiding for *him* where Robert de Mowbray holds footing ! *he*, methinks, after what chanced at Gloucester, may well have a clear eye for De Mowbray’s guilt ; *he* were the least likely of a thousand to wipe spot or speck from the ill-name even of a dog of thy subtle lord’s. This, my Liege, is foolery ; the Knight we speak of hath ridden forth, and, ere this, may be served after De Waleric’s fashion, for aught I know.”

“I hear ye, Lord Justiciary,” said the youth, “and know myself fore-judged—fore-doomed. Go on, in the name of Him who hears and suffers ye, and work your pleasure !—For De Mowbray—O ! blot and stain to knighthood ! that the very flower of its order, should be thus foully slandered, and not one gallant friend or generous foe to cry ‘peace, peace, for shame !’—He was, indeed, De Waleric’s enemy, and, in fair combat, had felt a warrior’s joy to strike him dead ; but never *thus*,—no ! though they had hated each other with the hate of fiends ! Look !

had the Knight been even as a coiled adder in my lord's path, what charmed De Mowbray's foot from crushing him? had he thirsted for such riddance, and been, besides, the *traitor* ye have said, what held but that your Grace's banner had been torn from De Waleric's towers, and he himself slain upon their battlements? Ere now, methinks, the hand of De Mowbray hath done bolder things. Thus much for my noble lord, who, I bless God, deal as ye list with me, lives yet to hear and to avenge!"

The last word lighted up a hundred countenances with yet fiercer fires—a sort of growl of execration ran through the assembly, and there were some who laid hand on hilt, as if for summary execution. The offending accents reached the King's ear imperfectly. "Ha!" he exclaimed, "what says the traitor's villain?"

"He threatens your royal Grace with De Mowbray's vengeance," said Montgomery, coolly.

"Believe it not," said Raymond, "although an Earl should swear it. I threatened *not* your royal Grace; but, perchance, Hugo de Montgomery, and they of his proud faction, that fawn upon him even in this presence, *they* may tell

over whose head such threat would hang like prophecy!"

The Marshal laid his huge hand upon a poniard, and then, withdrawing it, said, "This is the King's floor we tread on—I beseech your Grace let me not do your hangman a discourtesy."

"Now by the blood of a brave ancestry!" replied Cœur d'Acier, "*mine*, proud Earl, would do no shame to the best blade that ever yet was grasped in the fierce hand of a Bellesme!"

"Prate not of that," said the King, "for, by St. Luke's face! we will purvey thee far other passport to the kingdom of Satan! Although, caitiff as thou art, we ourselves will vouch for thee that thou hast the spirit of the great Devil himself; and pity and shame it were did we not forthwith put it to sharp trial. Ho, there! our Castle's Seneschal! have ye not, in these towers of Winchester, strange ghastly engines for cracking sinews and wrenching joints?"

"Rather," cried the yet unsubdued Raymond, "to spare bootless toil, have ye no axe and block within your towers? for, trust me, tyrant of England, as soon shall this tongue plead

guilty to De Waleric's murder when clay-cold
in my severed head, as under the worst torture
to which thou canst subject this living and
breathing frame!"

It must not derogate from Raymond's courage
to insinuate that there was something *politic* in
the very daring and ultra-intrepidity with which
this high strain of defiance was kept up. His
spirit, indeed, like the thunder-cloud rolling
against the blast, held its course most firmly
in the very teeth of the storm; but the King's
involuntary hint of admiration, wrung from him,
as it were, in spite of rage and fierceness, was
not lost upon its object, and convinced him that
an impression was made which, a little deep-
ened, and with the least turn of the tide, might
yet pilot his tossed bark into calm anchorage.

The first part of the King's answer seemed
to corroborate this.

"De Mowbray," he said, "is doubly damned
—he hath botched with treason and murder that
which God and St. George had else made right
noble and chivalrous. I would thou hadst
dealt thus foully upon one less true than De
Waleric, at the bidding of one less false than

the high traitor, De Mowbray! I would, I say, that it had been thus, that we might indeed have graced thee with the simple doom of axe and block. As it is, such grace shalt thou have as is yet ours to grant. Ho, there! our merry-men of the guard! torture him not, but hang him over the draw-bridge instantly!"

"Benedicite for the tender mercies of a Christian prince!" said Flambard insultingly.

"Why, if the malapert spirit hath thus smoothed his path," said the Marshal, "he may thank God for the devil's help!"

"By Mary-mother," said the Constable, "I looked he should have been torn in quarters."

"In good time, Milo de Miles," said the Justiciary—"His Grace's grace deals but with the *living*.—Vengeance may yet work further upon the *dead*."

"Why, be of good cheer then, Gallant," said the savage Montgomery, "belike some portion of thee shall back to the bonny banks of Tyne sooner than thou hast looked for."

"Foot, hand, and tongue, an' it like my Liege," said De Tunbridge, "for, by the faith of my

body, all and each have been serviceable members!"

"His *head*, might *I* advise," said De Lacy, taking up the song of unmanly triumph, "that when Earl Robert rides next by the 'New Castle,' he may rejoice to see how high it hath been exalted in his service."

Hope died in the bosom of the victim, but enough of native energy and fortitude remained to subdue a momentary thrill of bitterness, without any visible sign of the internal struggle. Unconquerable pride held the life-stream still in its wonted channels, and enabled the condemned—

"While the whole host of hatred stood hard by
To watch and mock him shrinking—"

To reply with unblanched cheek, and composed lip—

"Ye know but little of De Mowbray,—or, of a thousand parts, were your cruelty to rend me into such, ye had held none so dear and dreadful at once in *his* eyes as this firm and unflawed heart, beating, to the last, fearlessly and faith-

fully in his cause ! Search in the dark bosoms around thee, Sir King, and see if there be such a treasure under the proudest hauberk ! For the doom thou hast awarded me, I cry aloud against it to earth and heaven ! Wreak your blind vengeance as ye list—God will avenge De Waleric upon the Saxon."

"The Saxon !" exclaimed Flambard, with affected surprise—"Why, thou frontless and unfathomable villain ! grace conferred upon *thee* is like a jewel of gold in a swine's snout. Wilt thou not confess, and betake thee to the gallows with all thankfulness ? The Saxon, quotha ! —But since the good Earl of Chester *hath* put the word into thy mouth, e'en make the most of it ! My Sovereign Liege, I hold it meet your royal justice look further ere she strike, and first that, in the Saxon's name, Saxons have leave to speak. Now there are here, within my beck, certain of that race who come deputed by the 'Hundred,' in whose forest the deed was done, humbly to pray remittance of the fine which, in default of bringing up the guilty, the law demands of them ; for on their soul's salvation will they take it, De Waleric's blood lies not at their

door. Is it your Grace's pleasure they be heard?"

"Aye, by St. Luke's face!" cried the Monarch;—and the deputation was admitted accordingly.

But we will grace the introduction of these worthies with the formality of a new chapter.

CHAPTER V.

" Yes, these can lie,
Flatter and swear, forswear, deprave, inform,
Smile and betray, make guilty men, and beg
Their forfeit lives ; yet, foolish Tribune, know
A JUST MAN CANNOT FEAR !
Not though the malice of traducing tongues,
The open vastness of a tyrant's ear,
The senseless rigour of the wrested laws,
Or the red eyes of strained authority,
Should in a point meet all to take his life—
His innocence is armour 'gainst all these."

Ben Jonson.

THE Saxon deputation consisted of five members, four of whom appeared of the middling class of Franklins, "sober and sad of cheer;" but the fifth was of another order and aspect. He seemed a pilgrim, or of some monastic denomination, and was wrapped in the flowing gown common to those shrine-seeking devotees. The cowl or hood, however, was thrown back, and displayed the features of a pale, stern, sinister

looking man, aged, perhaps, (for it was not easy to guess,) forty, or forty-five, or even fifty. The shaven crown of an ecclesiastic, leaving only a circular ridge of thin grayish hair, and many deeply-indented lines upon the brow and cheeks, might have inclined a spectator's guess to the more advanced date ; but the fire of a restless eye, and the rapid alternate curl and compression of his lips, suggested rather the period of desire and passion—of the untamed heart and the burning will. The whole countenance spoke rather of exposure to sun and blast, and of the influence of worldly emotion, than the seclusion of a convent, with its dreamy and monotonous quiet.

All looked upon him with interest, but chiefly Raymond, both from the peculiar relation in which they were now placed, and because the stranger appeared the same who had prostrated himself so timelessly in the passage vaults beneath. The Squire's situation afforded no leisure for conjecture or curiosity, but a deeper feeling awoke, which neither time, place, nor circumstance could repress, when, in the first words the pilgrim uttered, he detected, or fancied, a

strong resemblance to the tones of his mysterious monitor of the forest and the dungeon ! If really so, by what inexplicable chain was he linked to this strange being, who, exerting attributes which seemed scarcely human, took yet an apparent human interest in ordinary human events ? nay, an individual interest in the disastrous circumstances which trammelled the youth himself ? From what source had the information he possessed been gathered ? Above all, by what demon-like audacity did he now present himself before the body, which, if his own words were to be trusted, *he* and *his* had treacherously deprived of life ?

While these thoughts shot rapidly through the mind of Raymond, their object stole an inquiring glance round the assembly, but withdrew it in some emotion, and recoiled a step or two on perceiving himself within a few feet of the bier.

“ Why, how now, peeled-pate ? ” said the King, in coarse allusion to the clerical tonsure, “ aghast, methinks, ha ? no marvel ; better practised eyes than thine love not to look upon such gear.— What manner of shaveling art thou ? ”

"A pilgrim I, from many a far shrine ;" was the reply.

"Right," said the monarch ; "rich in marvellous nothings, and marvellous poor in grace and honesty. But, pilgrim me no pilgrims ! thou art a priest—art not ?"

"A sometime poor brother of a poor house," replied the Religious, "of the strict rule of Holy Austin."

"Aye, beggar and cheat for the love of God." said Flambard. "Well, never the worse priest for that. To the boot of all, thou art a Saxon, ha ?"

"Alas !" ejaculated the Pilgrim, with bitter significancy.

"*Alas, Sir Pilgrim !*" iterated the Justiciary, "and wherefore '*alas !*' I pray you ? *alas* rather for those who have Norman blood in their poor bodies, if thy malignant race may thus sluice it out with less compunction and remorse than a drunken friar spills me a flaggon of muddy ale."

"Pardon, great Justiciary !" said the Devotee, "but who hath proven this wretched slaughter against the yet more wretched Saxon ?"

"*Proven !*" said the Minister, with an air of

scornful amusement — “*proven*, said ye, Sir Book-a-bosom ? Dost thou jest with me ? knowest thou not the law ? can it be *proven* that these murdered bones were not of Norman begetting ? If thou canst prove them *Saxon*, Grammercy ! trouble us no more in the matter, but hence with them in the devil’s name, and transmew them all into saints’ relics, if thou wilt ; fang-teeth of St. Barnabas, and finger-ends of Peter and Paul (heaven pardon me !)— But if *not* — and methinks thou art scarce *Haelruna** enough for *that*—bring up the guilty, or pay down the fine ! I promise thee, friend Saxon, here is a witness” (pointing to Raymond) “whose tale maketh shrewdly against ye !”

“ Ha !” exclaimed the Pilgrim in louder and harsher tones—“ Hath HE accused the Saxon ? then be his blood upon his head ! mine was the evil chance—yea, even mine—to travel hitherward in his accursed steps ! I saw—myself unseen the whilst—the slayers of yon Knight at their fierce work in the forest, and by the holiest Name, this *Norman* youth was in the midst of them ! I

* *Haelruna*, the Saxon term for a wizard.

heard the whistling of the death-shafts, and the groans of the struck victims ! and when the thunder of coming hoofs scared and scattered the shooters, behold ! a fire burned in my heart ! Rage and strength were heaped upon it as fuel, and I arose, and seized this hunter of men, even as a ram in a thicket, to give him as a prey and a spoil to the avengers of blood ! Lo, then ! we wrestled together as they that wrestle for life and death ; and the spirit that was within me prevailed mightily, and with a strong hand I threw him to the earth ! ”

“ Aye ! by St. Francis ; ” exclaimed the King, “ didst thou so ! a stout priest ! but say forth, peeled-pate, then— ”

“ Then,” continued the witness—“ even then a voice whispered my soul, ‘ Art thou not of the race of the trampled, and shall not ruin come upon thee even for righteousness ? Art thou not a Saxon, and shall not the Norman slay thee, even in thine innocence, for very rage and cruelty ? ’—and with the words of the voice mine heart sickened, and mine hand became as a babe’s—and I turned and fled afar off ! ”

Raymond suffered a double amazement. First,

at the inexplicable appearance of this dark witness at such a juncture ; and then, at the juggling compromise he seemed, as it were, striving to make with conscience, by the Jesuitical weaving of a few threads of truth into a wide tissue of falsehood. In “the midst of the assassins,” Raymond had indeed been.—He had indeed “wrestled as for life and death” with one whom it was easy now to identify with his present accuser.—He had indeed been thrown at last “with strong hand to the earth,”—but under circumstances how different from those inferred by the assembled nobles, it is, we trust, needless to recapitulate.

In vain did the youth himself, and, more than once, the Earl of Chester in his behalf, endeavour, by direct and circumstantial questioning, to draw from the Saxon, in his own despite, either more distinct assertions, or something too grossly contradictory to pass unchallenged even by those partial inquisitors. His answers enveloped every thing in mysticism and vagueness.

“Fire and fiends !” exclaimed at last the impatient Rufus—“didst thou behold him shoot

shaft or strike stroke! swear me *that* Sir Shaveling!"

"*That,*" replied the witness, "will I not swear. The sudden slaughter made dim mine eyes—blood, and the terrors of blood are not for him who hath sworn himself to peace."

"St. George!" exclaimed the Monarch, "but this is a strange tale! and, maugre thy prate about the terrors of blood, thou art a bold and a burly priest to lay grasp on such a gallant as this? How chanced it that he fled not with his fellow-butchers, ha?"

"Is it for one clad in these weeds to tell ye that?" answered the witness, "ye who are men of violence may better say whether Spoil treadeth not oft in the footsteps of Slaughter."

"A shrewd priest!" said Flambard — "a most judicious shaveling! one that knoweth a better matter than his breviary, I warrant him! And I am well remembered herein—" then, turning to the accused—"shew me that goodly ring of thine, Sir Squire of the loyal North."

"They who dragged me hither," said Raymond, "tore it from my finger."

"Oh, did they so?" returned Flambard—"why, thou speakest truth marvellously, when better may not be! and how came it upon thy fair finger, if it be modest asking?"

"How?" repeated the youth in surprise,— "from the hand of my noble Lord."

"Very hardly, methinks," said Ranulph, with a scornful smile—"it was more likely to pass from thy hand to that of thy Lord. Judge ye my Liege;" and, taking a ring from his finger, he extended it to Rufus, adding, "Heaven foster my judgment! I was minded to be trinket bearer for once."

Instantly as the Monarch glanced upon it he exclaimed, "To the drawbridge with him! he dies ere the world be a minute older! why! who knows not the cunning work of Othon?* This is De Waleric's signet! our own gift when he set forth for his northern charge.—Give me some wine there, ho! we will drink to his gallant soul's rest, but, by the Mother of Heaven! not one drop, although the thirst of Tartarus were upon our lip, until yonder villain swing betwixt moat and balance-beam! away with him!"

* Othon, a celebrated jeweller of that day.

Stunned—paralysed—with this last stroke of successful villainy, Raymond suffered himself to be dragged towards the place of doom, silent and self-abandoned. The savage officials who hurried him to his fate, were not tardy in their labour of love, and a few moments had sufficed to quench for ever the earthly light of a gallant and guiltless youth,

“But in the tiger’s path a lion lay—”

Three steps down the stairs which led from the hall, they encountered Alberic du Coci, hurrying in with the speed of life and death—

“Why how now, gentle Raymond? whither away in this evil sort?”

“To the drawbridge, gallant Knight,” answered the condemned, with ghastly calmness, “and then”

The rest was choked in utterance, for, brave, but not callous, Raymond was more affected by this single and sudden touch of kindly interest than by all the hate and scorn which had been showered upon him. One of his conductors, however, finished the sentence,—“and then to the foul fiend for a foul traitor!”

“Beast and slave that thou art to say it!”

shouted He of the Broken Lance—"thither will I send thee, with all thy fellows, to be yoke-mates in the chariot of Satan, if thou dost not tarry another bidding before doing scathe to one hair of his head ! Look to it, villains ! I have powerful warrant for this. Fitz Morton !" (addressing a new retainer) "watch thou here, and rip the bowels of the first he that lifts a finger."

And, thus saying, he burst into the hall, just as the King's harsh tones were again at the highest :

"Speak not for him, Sir Earl ! he dies, were he fifty times the squire of thy traitor-friend ! he shall hang were he my brother ! I will not hear mortal lip in his behoof !"

"Hear mine, at least, most gracious Sovereign!" exclaimed a voice from the press, which called a gloomy fire into the eyes of Montgomery and his party, and sent assurance to the breast of Raymond, as the trumpet-peal of advancing aid rallies a broken host.

In the next instant Du Coci was at the monarch's foot.

The moment he raised his bowed head from

the pavement, Rufus, who never forgot the face of either friend or foe, stepped back as from an apparition—

“Saints and seraphs! have we a spirit here?”

“In clay, my sovereign Liege, good mortal clay, and, moreover, faithful and true as thy royal heart could wish, although mine own lips boast it.”

“Cry ye mercy, then, for our sickly judgment,” said the King. “We have been wont to think of Alberic du Coci as cold and stark in a traitor’s grave.”

“Look, good my Liege,” said the Adventurer, “for being cold and stark, I forgive all who said it, saving only such as will not now believe their own eyes and ears that I am yet on the better bank of Limbo-lake. For the black addition of ‘*traitor*’—in God’s name, most mighty Sovereign, if *he* who alone of your high lieges listed or dared to brand me with such spiteous phrase—if *he*, I say, hath since been ever faithful and true himself, chop off my head! and speed it hence to him as the fairest token of your royal favour; but if not——”

“If not,” interrupted Rufus, “what then?

is it therefore that thy busy and forbidden body
is thrust between our vengeance and yonder
felon?"

"And if not," said the Justiciary in the same strain, "and De Mowbray be known for a most rank and pestilent traitor, prove we, at once, who loves or hates him for the same ; and that by a new test, before thou hast further leave to prate in this presence, Sir Knight."

While all wondered what was to follow, three strides placed the Justiciary in front of Abbot de Lozenge, from whose hand he took (we had almost said *snatched*) the crozier or pastoral staff, saying,

"Grammercy for my boldness, holy Father—
although this symbol* is somewhat out of bearing-bounds. We will—under favour of Mother Church—begin first with *thee*."

Then, extending the crozier towards him ; he added — "*Super hoc signum, Domine Abbate*, is Robert de Mowbray guilty, or not guilty, of this slaughter ?"

* We believe the learned Justiciary refers to the fact that it was not allowable, in that age, for an Abbot to carry his pastoral insignia beyond the bounds of his Abbacy.

"Destruction and Death," said the ready Churchman, "have heard the fame thereof with their ears—he is most surely *guilty!*"

The holy symbol was then extended, in like manner, and with like formula, in succession, to all present, at least to all of the higher grade, who formed the immediate circle round the bier. The Constable—the Marshal—De Lacy, and a few others, took the condemnatory *test* as it was called, with the air of men whose minds were fully made up upon the point; who neither doubted the fact nor hesitated to avouch it. There was less of the resolved manner about De Tunbridge, whose eye, chancing to meet that of Hugh-le-Loup, read, in its severe glance, something which shook the firmness of his answer. He tried and rejected more than one form of reply, and even, at last, clothed it in terms of rather qualified import. Flambard hesitated, for an instant, to withdraw the crozier, and was almost upon the point of wringing from him a less equivocal verdict; but, with a peculiar smile, he forbore, and turned to the Earl of Chester. That potent Borderer put aside the extended symbol with no reverential hand, saying:

“Pass on, Lord Justiciary ; enough, methinks, have I spoken upon this head, and enough have my words been scorned.”

No attempt was made to force the test upon this powerful recusant, nor did the looks of any present offer a commentary upon his refusal. But the case was very different when it fell to Du Coci’s turn to give evidence over the Abbot’s staff.—Every eye was upon him. Every ear was bent to catch the first word he should utter. All present had been struck by the earnest appeal of Raymond to this man’s evidence, and by his own sudden and strange arrival in the very crisis of the youth’s fate. All, therefore, awaited his reply with intense interest ; but the more deeply initiated—they of the compact entered into, that morning, at Wolvesley Castle, glared upon him with eyes literally blazing with impatience and curiosity.

“Thou, Sir Knight,” said the Minister, “hast seen with thine own eyes, and heard with thine own ears ; avouch then, is De Mowbray of Northumberland guilty, or not guilty, of this slaughter ?”

“Guilty ;” replied the Adventurer, without

a moment's hesitation—"as surely guilty as ever was mortal man of mortal sin."

The confederacy breathed lighter, and interchanged glances of assurance.

"Look, good my Liege," continued Du Coci, "Truth perches upon strange twigs at last, for as shy a bird as she is. These papers" (drawing a packet from his bosom, and presenting it to the Monarch) "peeped from beneath the folds of De Waleric's vest, as I turned him o'er, in the crimson puddle of his blood, to mark if life were indeed gone. I drew them forth with a discreet hand, unseen, and, at mine after-leisure, thrusting modesty aside, made bold with the clerkly contents. Read, my Liege, and pardon me that other than your royal eye hath been the first to look upon such documents."

The surprised King glanced first at the superscription, which was after the following quaint and *lengthy* fashion.

"For the eye of my Sovereign Liege; the within letters, seized upon the body of one slain in their defence; the same being of evil-threatening tenor, touching both his Grace's authority, and the life of him who hath been thus bold to

intercept them ; as witness his hand and seal, and those of a holy man, his chaplain, in the King's towers of the New Castle on Tyne bank.

(Signed) HUGO DE ST. WALERIC, Castellan.

MARTIN HEZELBIGGE, Chaplain.

It was clear from this that the intercepted epistles were understood to be from De Mowbray, and, at one period, intended for immediate transmission to the king's hand, whatever had subsequently determined De Waleric to be at last the bearer of his own packet.

The inclosures were two, both without either address or signature, and indorsed only with a single initial letter each, as a memorandum of direction, doubtless, for the luckless bearer. The contents of the first, marked “C——,” ran as follow :—

“—— You have fooled me *once* ; never man did so *twice*. I will not again budge southward a foot's breadth. If thou canst leave turning and changing, and blowing hot and cold with the same breath, and looking now backward, now forward, say at once that I shall *have the gem we treated for*. But resolve me this by the

bearer, aye or no, and let this somewhat perilous matter of writing have an end."

It will be easily guessed that this epistle had been intended for the Earl of Chester.

The one indorsed "A——" was in another vein.

"To Him that I would have greater; and *shall be*, if the weeds of his own heedless husbandry choke not the golden harvest—These, by a sure hand; and yet, darkly, in respect of many perils of interception, whether on land or main.

"Wilt thou embrace the glory I have shadowed out? Be speedy in adoption—time wears—and a brave blow might be stricken while he you wot of plunges with his outworn troops amidst the fastnesses of the west. They of whom ye have doubt shall be well looked to—north and south. For the toad that swells with venom on Tyne bank, *the heel is lifted that shall crush him*, and, (in good earnest of my will and power,) *look to have news hereof ere thou art midway hither.*"

Upon this last text there needed no clearer comment than the slaughter of De Waleric.

"Now, by my father's tomb!" exclaimed Rufus, "I thank thee, Alberic du Coci! Thou hast done me good service—thou hast given me substance for shadow—noontide clearness for morning mist! Who hath *written* these goodly letters, methinks it were now idle to say, and to whom of our faithful and loyal lieges they are *addressed*, be it thy charge, Lord Justiciary, to make out. What, ho! there! Doth yonder villain yet live? To the death with him, I say! He shall hang ere the foot of mortal man stir from our castle hall!"

"Not for vengeance upon a thousand De Mowbrays, though they had slain a thousand De Walerics!" exclaimed Du Coci. "The youth is guiltless as infancy itself!"

"Ha! fire and fiends! *what say'st thou?*" shouted the King; "have we night and fog once more?"

"No mighty Liege! not so — broad noon and the clear heaven of truth for Raymond!" replied his champion. "De Mowbray hath stricken by other hands. Well was it said, even now, that in this matter I have seen with mine own eyes, and heard with mine own ears.—With mine own ears, when first we stumbled

on yonder butchery, I heard the cries for help without which, the youth had lain hidden in the forest for evermore ! With mine own eyes I beheld him bound, foot, head and hand, to the spread roots of an oak, fast as ever was captive in dungeon shackles. From thence he was cut loose by the ready hands of mine own varlet. Yet more, great King, for more do I chance to know. He was, in past years, the foster-child of the very Knight whom he is charged with slaying, and would have died ten deaths in his defence, rather than lifted finger to do him scathe ! This, if my Liege scorn not the word of an unbeliever, the rich Hebrew, Jodesac, can testify, and there is yet in the Jew's hand a token to give your Grace some guess what manner of blood flows in the veins of Cœur d'Acier."

The King gazed in Sir Alberic's face for an instant or two with the air of one equally perplexed and amused—then, with a levity common to his habits, burst into his usual discordant laughter, and swore his usual oath, by "St. Luke's face," that it was "a more tangled matter to take up than the shattered meshes of a double hauberk."

In fact, the torrent of evil feeling in the royal

breast had now brawled itself away, and none cared gratuitously to put a malicious spoke in the wheel of Raymond's second redemption from the gibbet ; on the contrary, when Rufus was about to demand from Sir Alberic some solution of the mystery of the signet-ring, before yielding implicit credence to his defence, Flambard, laying a finger gently upon the Royal arm, said in low tones,

"Let him not hang for *that*—I have choice of these trinkets, and, it may be, have put the wrong one into your Grace's hand. Tush, my Liege, I will exchange with ye, anon, *De Mowbray's* signet for *De Waleric's*."

The Monarch again laughed his hoarse laugh. "But what," he said, "hath the Saxon Shaveling to say to this?"

The new interest of Du Coci's appearance upon the scene had diverted from the Saxon the eyes and thoughts of all present, and although the latter now reverted to him, it was impossible to replace the former,—the mysterious Pilgrim had vanished, none knew whither or how, but his dropped gown, like the Prophet's mantle, remained as a farewell-token.

"Here is the *slough of the snake*, my Liege," said De Lacy, picking up the pilgrim-vesture, "but he himself hath crept to thicket."

The next moment saw the reprieved Raymond at the feet of the King.

"A hundred lives hast thou," said the Monarch, "and with each a good angel to do battle for it—or else, by Mary-Mother! ere this thou hadst looked the King of Tophet in the face, in lieu of the King of England. No doubt thou art too faithful a fool to rise up, Sir Raymond, of the Spur of gold, to the boot of Heart of steel, in return for quitting a Traitor's service—ha?"

"My gracious Liege," said Raymond, in a tone sufficiently indicative of his purposed reply.

"Enough," interrupted the King. "It were poor music to hear thee scorn our offer. Up and away, Sir Squire! good leave hast thou, aye, and command to boot, to make our city-walls quit of thee, ere another sun glitter upon their battlements. And beware—if thou shalt take knighthood at another hand—beware, I say, of a hempen gorget for couching a traitor's lance. Get thee hence, and whisper thy proud

lord that, if he feast not speedily with us in Winchester, by Mary-Mother ! we will ourself play the visitor, and taste the good cheer of his Earldom, with sixty thousand lances in our train. Away!"

Cœur d'Acier started to his feet—made answer at once to threats, and taunts, and clemency, by a deep parting obeisance—kissed the cold hand of the dead, and grasped the warm palm of Du Coci—looked firmly upon his recent accusers as he passed—and, finally, with elastic step and spirits, quitted the royal hall ; lighter at heart than when he entered it, by the weight of Pelion and Ossa.

Thus, to the almost entire satisfaction of all parties, ended the strange scene we have endeavoured to describe. The enemies of De Mowbray had fixed upon him the odium of a savage slaughter, and broken all bonds between him and the Sovereign. Raymond was snatched from death to life ; and his frank-hearted defender, Du Coci, had succeeded, for once, " in so serving Heaven as not to offend the devil."

CHAPTER VI.

" Certes (said he) I mean me to disguise
In some strange habit, after uncooth wise,
Like to a pilgrim ———."

SPENSER. *Mother Hubbard's Tale.*

" Here Venus sits in likeness of a Nun."

WORDSWORTH.

We shall scarcely be asked, even by the most inapprehensive of readers, whether it was indeed the Lady Matilda, who, in the garden of Nunna Mynstre, and under the semblance of a daughter of that solemn mansion, addressed herself to Raymond and his Lady in terms so wild and startling. It was no other than the strange kinswoman of Hugh-le-Loup—girl in years and aspect—woman in pride and passion—man in ambitious hope and project—and something more than these in the daring and inflexible

spirit with which a passion or a purpose, once harboured or resolved, was borne along to its consummation.

After the rencontre in the garden, duties, many and solemn, withdrew the Lady Abbess from her guest, and abandoned the latter to her own stormy thoughts in the gloomy parlour of the Superior, through whose lofty but narrow lattices the dim and discoloured day-beam shot in subdued splendour, and lighted up the antique monastic garniture frugally scattered around its sombre walls, in the manner best pleasing to the ascetic dweller.

Neither did it accord indifferently with the mood or aspect of the present inmate, who paced the narrow precincts of her solitude,

"Like to the restless cavia in her den,"

and even vented aloud something of the dark feelings which preyed upon her repose.

"And *this*, then"—she muttered—"this is the incomparable Constance!—this the boasted daughter of De Mowbray! for whose love the soft-lipped Stephen de Albemarle sighs like a sickly page, and the fierce De Lacy glows like an

armourer's forge—for whom Nobles have splintered lances, and Princes have been hurled out of their saddles, while the lips of a Monarch cried ‘well done, well done !—ha?——’

Then—suddenly pausing in her disturbed pace—she added, “ And why thus suddenly snatched from the worship of those fools of France ? why recalled to his grim towers at such a juncture, when not alone rocks his broad earldom, as though an earthquake struggled beneath it, but even his very life is jeopardied ? There is a purpose in’t—aye, and a deep one—deeply hidden. But, ere the shadow of Matilda darken a threshold of De Mowbray, *that* shall be known and cared for ! A blessed hap to be mewed up, in yonder tempest-shaken Bamborough, with this adored one ! She the admired of all admirers—the load-star of all hearts and eyes ! while I— Oh, phrenzy even to think on’t !—I, be-matroned and be-moped in his dark halls, must play the housewife and the venerable ; and treasure my eclipsed smiles and sickly glances for the sole gaze of my haughty lord, lest it be whispered that the poor faded dame would vie in beauty with her fair step-child ! And *shall* it be thus ?

her? first will I know what busy fiend hath flung the sear and shrivelling autumn upon these lips even in mid-spring! first will I know whether these eyes be indeed duller than lead—whether this skin hath more of snow or saffron. For *you*," she added, vindictively apostrophizing the spirit of her unconscious rival in the lists of admiration—"for *you*, my Lady Miracle! look to your marvellous self! if you must needs sparkle in *my* sky, it shall be under cloud and with shorn beams, I promise ye."

She then threw herself into a seat, and, in the indulgence of dark thoughts and projects, wore through the long and else wearisome period before the Abbess again broke upon her solitude.

But the return of that severe Dignitary brought not the immediate opportunity for conference which Matilda longed for, and which, indeed, was the chief cause of her continued stay in Nunna Mynstre. A spare repast, and the attendance of a sad-eyed vestal, during its dull lenten discussion, imposed a silence which the impetuous visitor could ill endure.

The fragments of the Carthusian banquet once removed, however, and the lengthened thanks-

giving over, she scrupled not to hint her desire for their attendant's dismissal, and scarcely was the suggestion complied with, ere she thus abruptly addressed the Convent Mother—

“When goes hence De Mowbray's daughter?”

“Did ye not hear?” was the counter-question of the surprised Abbess.

“Aye, by'r Lady,” returned Matilda; “but I believed not. To-night, methinks, if the boy-guardian work his pleasure.”

“*If!*” iterated the Nun—“what need of ‘if?’ who shall gainsay him?”

“Thou, Holy Mother, an' it please Heaven and St. Mary.”

The Superior sat more and more erect.

“Wherefore,” she said, “should it please Heaven and our blessed patron? or for what cause should I, their unworthy handmaid in this dwelling, do thus by De Mowbray's daughter?”

“For pity and tender heart, if ye will,” said Matilda, with the sarcastic levity seldom long absent from her lip—“Heard ye not the maiden herself bemoan the hest of her lord and sire, touching this dark journey, and speak of perils

threatening her by the way? it were but Christian tenderness, methinks, to bid her keep cell and cloister for a space; and let the Gallant breathe his palfreys the whilst, and take patience perforce this holy tide of Pentecost."

Up rose the Lady-Abbess of St. Mary's, with quivering lip, and looking taller and whiter even than usual.

"Dost thou *jest* with me?" she said.

"*Jest!* holy Mother!" replied the visitor; "we of the Western Marches know not the word; blood and broil make us sad of speech and sober of cheer. It is in simple earnest that I have said, and say again, let not the daughter of De Mowbray go hence to-night—no, nor to-morrow."

"Kinswoman of Hugh-le-Loup," said the Abbess, "yet more, daughter of her who, while she abode on earth, and while I myself was yet in the gall of the world's bitterness, I loved after the fashion of the world; for her sake—for the sake of Hugh-le-Loup, who hath been a right noble patron of our house; and for the remembrance of the goodly gifts of thine own hand to

these poor walls—for all these, I have borne with thee this day, and done for thee, as never more will I bear and do for mortal woman. I have dissembled before the altar of our Lady, and seen—seen by mine own sinful sufferance—the garb of her sworn daughters, the raiment sanctified to her ministry, profaned by a light worldling, for light and worldly purposes—may, it may be, for the furtherance of worldly passion, sinful as light. I tell thee, maiden, I have journeyed with thee to the last footstep of my frailty in this crooked path; for I discern in thee, and in the demand thou hast even now made, far other purpose than thou would'st list to avow. What were the midnight travel of Constance de Mowbray to thee, although her path lay through the valley of the shadow of Death?"

"Much;" answered Matilda, "much that your convent-wisdom dreams not of. But if the pure gold of my charitable purpose be thus suspected of base mixture, in God's name let it sleep unquestioned in this abused casquet" (slightly pressing her exquisitely moulded bo-

(om) “yet, good or evil, this let me tell you, holy Mother, it touches right nearly the weal of Nunna Mynstre.”

“Ha!” exclaimed the alarmed Religious.

“Why,” returned the secular dame, “De Mowbray is charged with treason. Hear ye not *that*, even in the deaf hush of your sullen cloisters? If not, speed hence his daughter under the night-cloud, as ye purpose, and, trust me, betwixt the next matins and primes, the King himself shall tell ye of it, in such tones as may chance to rock your very altar. Bethink ye, Mother, what better pledge—what likelier gage for the returning fealty of De Mowbray, than the fair stranger within your gates? his dear and sole one? she, in the avenging hand of the monarch, were better worth than a stout garrison of his hired Brabançons in every tower and town north of the Humber. Be ye sure that word hath passed, or will right speedily pass, to the royal ear, what manner of guest hath tarried in Nunna Mynstre. Now, when she hath sped in safety from your portals to her rebellious home, whether the proud and provoked King be one to brook tamely such

rending of the prey from his grasp, judge ye, holy Lady, I beseech ye. Be advised, therefore, after what fashion ye will doff his fury aside and bid it pass—with what voice ye will say to the hurricane ‘be still !’ and with what subtlety eschew the tender mercies of Ranulph Flambard ; he—the great Justiciary, who seized, and sold for a goodly price, the revenues of Nunna Mynstre ; and, with scant reverence. I doubt not, would even now do as much for this solemn domain of yours.”

The Abbess strove to conceal her rising apprehension ; “ Is the proud Monarch,” she said, or his fierce favourite, the shepherd of this fold ? that, for the terror of *their* voice reproving, I should chain the innocent as pledge for the guilty, and deal with the stray lamb under my charge as with a ram caught in a thicket ? Or is it meet that I should fear man rather than God ?”

“ Human *fear*, ” said Matilda, “ is no plant of human choice ;—it is the weed wilful, that springs where it lists, and dies when it cannot choose. I know not how much ye should fear God or man ; but I know of whom it hath been

said, ‘he fears God but little—man not at all;’ I know whose ravenous maw hath had no *fear* to gorge itself with vacant benefices;—yea, and in scorn of Rome and all her thunders, will yet be crammed with many a like dainty. I know who would chop off the head of priest as well as layman, that should presume, without his will, to choose betwixt Urban and Clement, which be true Pope or false—such stinted reverence is his for church or churchman, lord abbot or lady abbeas, (saving your presence, holy Mother.) And, knowing this, methinks I may well urge, ‘keep ye De Mowbray’s daughter while ye may.’—”

“And make a dungeon of our solemn sanctuary!” rejoined the Abbess, in a tone of indignation—“not for the rood of Tosti! were its gems quadrupled. If the fierce King and his yet fiercer favourite have claim upon the maiden, and list to tear her hence with the mailed hand, these are not the moated towers of a chieftain, to bid defiance to wrong and sacrilege. He in whose hand is vengeance shall repay it, and the curse of their iniquity shall not cleave to these sinless doors!”—

She turned to quit the apartment; but paused upon the threshold, and, looking back, added,

"Evil counsel hast thou given me, touching this poor damsel of De Mowbray's—but mark, daughter of a haughty race! if they that be mighty in this stormy land, are indeed so greedy to fill their holes with ravin, and their dens with prey, not alone upon the riches of the despised church, shall be the swoop of their deadly falcon! other prey, as dainty, if less sacred, will they devour. Even in the hush of our sullen cloisters, as ye have scornfully named them, it hath been told and heard with what a grinding hand the kingly claim of *wardship* falls ever and anon on some of your proud order. Take counsel, therefore, thou that, in thy callow youth, art so fain to give it, even to grey-haired Eld—thou who wouldest behold the meshes of a tyrant's net gathered around another, look well that thine own footsteps be charmed from the snare of the fowler.—Get thee assurance, Lady, whose *ward* thou art! lest, in an evil hour, undreaded till it be upon thee, thine own beauty be given for a prey to the hard of heart; and the comeliness of thy youth for a possession to

the spoiler ! lest the heiress of De Aquila be flung to the first crested ruffian that doth a pleasure to his riotous Paravail ; or, if she list not to obey, behold her inheritance despoiled, even with as free a hand as ever yet dealt terribly with holy church.—Benedicite, proud maiden, and take heed !” added the excited Dignitary, and, with these admonitory words, vanished from the apartment.

“Get thee gone, screech-owl !” said Matilda, “why ! who would have suspected *thee* of so much of the wisdom of this world ? methought thou hadst neither ear nor eye, except for organ-pipe and breviary-book.—Evil-boding skeleton ! she hath stricken the very chord harped on by De Mowbray.—But have I, in very deed, such cause for apprehension in this accursed matter of wardship ? hath it become question, even in these dreaming solitudes, whether Hugh-le-Loup be prince or puppet in his palatinate ? ha ! —A ward of William the Red ? St. Hugh of Cluni forbid ! flung at the foot of the first brawny He that may strike strongest or bid highest ! I had as lief his charger’s heels were yerked in my forehead ! I had rather the

broad lands once subject to the banner of my sires were narrowed to the breadth of a squire's pennon, or I myself sepulchred quick beneath them, were their acres a million!—ho! who art thou?" she added, starting, as the door suddenly flew wide, and a figure, gowned and hooded, drew near.

"A Pilgrim I, from many a far shrine," answered the visitor, in tones not unfamiliar to the ear of Matilda; as, perhaps, the words themselves may not be quite new to the reader. Neither are the gown and hood matters of entire novelty to the latter, the same having figured in our last chapter. But the voice which now issued from beneath them was far different from the sepulchral tones that grated with lying accusal upon the ear of Raymond.

"And to what saint next," said the lady, "may thy religious body be minded to fall down?"

The seeming devotee, who had already waved from the threshold the matron that ushered him thither, now closed the door with a very unseeming energy, and, dropping hastily upon one knee, exclaimed,

"To the fairest in broad England ! and, if there be gift of price worthy to offer at such a shrine——"

"Doubtless"—interrupted Matilda—"such a gift thou esteemest thy marvellously gifted self. Pity that we saints of the muddy earth look with such bargaining eyes to detect base metal in seeming gold—vile stones in proffered jewellery. Cramp not thy knee in despised orisons, De Lacy,—thy worship is not accepted. Stand up, I say, or, as I live, the Lady Abbess shall be witness of thy devotion."

"That were somewhat of the harshest, lovely Matilda," answered Reginald de Lacy, rising and throwing back the superfluous cowl. "But not for Lady Abbess nor Lord Abbot, will I lose this golden moment to swear to thee, by heaven and earth, that never mortal man burned with a fiercer love than Reginald de Lacy cherishes in his true heart for Matilda de Aquila!"

"Our Lady keep us from perjury!" said the dame.

"Amen!" responded the gallant, "and from hardness of heart withal!"

"Cry you mercy;" answered Matilda. "I

am as pitiful as flint. Thou shalt see me weep mill-stones, to think that I am thus trammelled in the vile meshes of wardship, and may not dutifully hold the stirrup for what knightly foot best pleases me, even though it were cased in the mailed boot of a De Lacy; saving, indeed, at peril of such forfeiture as would fling the escheated acres of De Aquila into the grasp of my Suzerain, and drive *Dame Lackland* to cell and cloister in good earnest. Alas ! I fear me, there would be scant heaving of sighs, and splintering of lances, for one whose dower had dwindled to hood and kirtle."

" You do but mock me, Lady," replied the Baron. " If the will of Hugh-le-Loup be the sole bar to mine happiness, I will cast me at his foot, and bind me to ride under his banner, when and whither he lists. He shall command me in all knightly sort—hand and heart—body and soul. If he *reject* my suit, give but thine own consent, lovely Matilda, and let the western wolf devour every knight's fee of thine inheritance ! I will win for thee, with lance and battle-axe, as fair a possession in the north as thou canst lose in the west. From the bat-

tlements of my towers of Newark, too, those peerless eyes shall look over no petty heritage ; —many a brave forest,—many a fair rood of meadow-land and wood-pasture, shall own thee queen ; and not within the seas of Britain shall there be wedded matron more famed and honooured than mine own incomparable Matilda ! ”

“ It is well and gallantly said,” replied the object of this rhapsody, with the half-sarcastic, and yet grave and quiet air, which sometimes perplexed even those who best knew her. She then added, less equivocally, “ But swear it, De Lacy, swear it ; hast thou not one light oath to leaven this huge lump of protestation ? ”

The Knight tasted the bitter amongst the sweets, but knew not better how to answer than by literal compliance with the suggestion.—“ By earth and sky ! —— ” he broke forth—“ by all that—— ”

“ Peace ! ” interrupted the Lady, in other tones—“ peace, and have done, for a sworn villain ! There is one under this roof—aye, perchance, within a wall’s breadth of our very footing, whose eye, with its least glance, were worth a thousand lances to thy bosom for such

perfidy, if it be not hardened to the temper of the beaten steel that covers it!"

The dark, fierce eye of the Baron dilated to its full, as he broke into exclamation, "What mortal he——?"

"No mortal *he!*" again interrupted Matilda.—"It is *she—she*, I say, Sir Villain, whose name thine own evil conscience might thunder to thee aloud—Constance de Mowbray!"

This was a home-thrust.—De Lacy staggered under it for a moment, but not longer. The true son of a fierce age, in plain language, as hardened a ruffian, and as brave a soldier, as ever drew breath; he was not even susceptible of those comparative refinements which had begun to mark the conduct of some *preux chevaliers* in matters of "*loyauté aux dames.*" He raised his unabashed front to the bitter scrutiny of the Damoiselle, and said in low and incredulous tones:—

"Thou art but paltering with me, maiden—Constance de Mowbray within the towers of Nunna Mynstre!"

"Add scorn to perfidy," replied Matilda—"say that thou believest me not, and by mine

honest word, De Lacy, I will give thee proof to thine heart's content ! Ere thou canst drop the cowl over that most brazen brow, I will have hither the gentle Constance, and, in *her* ears, proclaim thee, to thy very teeth, the perjured villain thou hast manifested thyself."

" Do not so, Lady !" cried the Baron, hastily, averse, in spite of all his effrontery, to such a rencontre—" Do not so, I beseech thee, lest I be driven to take amends, after a fashion thou would'st little relish."

" Ha !" exclaimed Matilda, in some surprise.

" I have wronged thee," continued the suitor ; " I seek not to deny it—but trample not upon me too fiercely——"

" What ! lest the trodden worm should turn again ?"

" Say, rather, the forked adder, proud girl ! that repays the spurning heel with a deadly guerdon !"

" Dost thou threaten ?" said Matilda.

" If I be driven to it ;" was the reply. " I know that thy haughty kinsman, Lupus, grows not so fair and fast in the King's eye as heretofore ; a storm may yet come to root him up ;

or, at the least, to shake *thee* out of thy nestling-place in his branches, and throw the hand and heritage of thy father's daughter into the giving of another and a mightier. Hast thou never heard whisper of this, fair Lady? I promise thee, the learned and clerkly Flambard holds shrewdly that the King hath stout claim to call thee ward—if so, by Saint George, my royal Liege is a good Prince, and a gracious—He will remember who hath done him fair service: *this* hand hath been toiling in the gauntlet, while others, that I wot of, were bare at the banqueting-table."

"Hast thou yet done, brave Knight?" said the Lady.

"Wilt thou yet listen, fair Damoiselle?" rejoined the Baron.

"Try;" was the laconic answer; and, as she spoke, she seated herself in the Lady Abbess's chair.

De Lacy looked keenly upon her, as if to gather with what actual feeling she thus spoke; and then seemed irresolute in what terms to proceed. After a hasty stride or two across the apartment, he went on,

"Thou art a fair creature, Matilda de Aquila! and hast a spirit worthy to mate with mine.—Accursed be the lips that told thee of my love for Constance! for I have loved her,—aye, long and deeply! I strive not now to deny it. Nay, by my blessed Patron, I love her yet! but scorn and icy coldness are my sole return. Even at King Philip's tournament of Paris, when in her honour I had thrown four champions out of saddle and stirrup, and ridden to my pavilion with one vantage or other over yet three more—all proper lances as a man may change buffets with—she guerdoned me with looks of such frosty favour as a proud bishop flings upon a begging friar;—as if life and limb were matters of a peasant's purchase; and horse and man of as little worth as the whelps of a shepherd's brach. It was far other, belike, when the smooth-tongued Stephen of Albemarle pranced around the barriers, although he had but jeopardied his trim body against raw and beardless varlets that, in my life, King Philip had gifted with spur and baldric for the love of their fair sisters and mothers. Oh, she hath scorned and wronged me, and I am passing weary on't;—to say

nought of the blown pride of her moody sire.—And if thou, lovely Matilda, despite what hath come and gone, wilt be the bride of De Lacy, in good sooth it shall be little heart-pinch to him if Constance de Mowbray wed with De Albemarle's horse-boy ! but if *not*, mark ye”

“Aye,” exclaimed the Lady, “if not—if *I* also keep the shut heart and the scornful eye—what then?”

“Then, as I live and breathe,” he continued, “ye shall find it ill playing the scornful with Reginald de Lacy ! I will have one or other, will she, nill she, despite of shut heart or scornful eye, of king or kinsman—just, by'r Lady, as chance or choice may fall out.”

“Shun either to chance or choose *this* way,” replied Matilda. “I should make thee a fearful bride, De Lacy, if there were virtue either in sharpened steel or poisoned goblet. But what poor boasting is this of thine ! Thou art fool, methinks, as well as villain, trusting to shake the purpose of Constance or Matilda by such threats as are fitted but to strike the coward ear of a churl's daughter. For *myself*, had I ever once loved thee as I could love even a

cur, I had hated thee now with a deadly hate. But there was never *love*, De Lacy, and there is no *hate*—no, by St. Mary, nor *fear*!—Credit me, proud Baron, I am rooted far beyond thy up-plucking. For the gentle Constance, she, belike, is a more delicate plant, and hath no thorn of defence upon her own stalk; but then, her very *name*—the very name, I say, of De Mowbray is as a hedge of spears around her; a hedge which thou durst as soon look Satan in the face as throw thyself upon."

"*Durst* not!" exclaimed De Lacy.

"Durst not;" iterated the Lady—"For thy audacious soul, thou durst not! Why, we may bring it to fair proof.—She journeys hence to-night under the poor escort of a stripling squire, and some half-score of archers;—get thee a like troop, or double numbers if thou wilt; and set upon them in the forest. What holds but that the stout-hearted De Lacy may thus purvey him a mistress for his fair towers of Newark, with all their goodly roods, and oxgangs of coppice-wood and meadow-land?"

"St. George! St. Edward!" exclaimed the Baron, "but these be strange tidings, and

yet stranger counsel!—Ha! gentle my Lady Icicle! This were a rare means of bringing thee into the thaw-wind! but, Damoiselle of the Western Marches, what shall be my warrant that, were it even thus, thou—*thou*, I say, would'st not be the first to blazon my good deeds in the towers of Winchester? to proclaim me the bold faitour who had carried the lovely fawn from her keepers, to browse in a strange park? ha? By our Lady's wimple, as strong as my towers of Newark be, it were no gambol to have the king thundering with ram and catapult upon the southern gate, and De Mowbray making the like music upon the north."

"I grant ye," answered Matilda, "but let thou and I, Reginald de Lacy, understand each other, and ye shall not need to dance to one or other of these doleful pipings."

"I understand thee not," returned the Baron, "and, by St. Michael, I think it is in vain striving thereat!"

"Let there be no strife between us, De Lacy; nay, I will make a league with thee, fast and firm, and it shall be thine own fault if thou art not the gaining party therein. Shall it be thus?"

The Knight replied only by a doubtful smile, and a hasty shrug of the shoulders, while the lady proceeded to the opening of preliminaries.

"First," she said, indicating a seat opposite to her own, "first let me play the hostess; and I would, fair Sir, that it comported with the gravity of this house to proffer a brimmed goblet, while we discuss terms of treaty."

"Let pass," said, the Baron, "and, for the lack thereof, make thy proposed terms the briefer and sweeter."

"Brief as man's honesty," she replied, "and sweet as woman's revenge. First then, the high and mighty Baron de Lacy shall swear to think rather of an angel of light for his bride than Matilda de Aquila, be she whose ward she may, and although King and kinsman alike cried 'win and wear her.' Next, he shall be true knight and loving to Constance de Mowbray, even to the seizing of her person this very night, if our Lady and St. Julian be gracious, and, touching which, I, Matilda de Aquila, sole keeper of the secret, swear to be mute as a shut sepulchre. Art thou content, good ally?"

"Since better may not be," answered De Lacy; "and if all be meant that is spoken. What more?"

"Little, but to purpose;" replied Matilda, with a sudden earnestness of manner. "Thou, De Lacy, shall henceforth take no part in plot or faction against De Mowbray——"

"Ha!" exclaimed the Baron.

"Rather," she continued, "if need be, thou shalt espouse *his* quarrel, even though against foes as potent as the Marshal and the Constable, or him that will in time trample upon ye all—Ranulph, the Fire-brand."

De Lacy shook his head. "This," he replied, "is an evil item in our treaty; and methinks, Lady, ye are steering a light bark upon too rough an ocean. Know ye not that De Mowbray hath present quarrel with one mightier than all—the King himself! Would'st thou that I should pledge me to buckle mail in the cause of a rebel and a traitor?"

"I have heard clerks say," answered Matilda, "aye, and grave and holy ones, that thousands who have perished as traitors and as rebels, had they buckled mail each in firm faith with each,

would have lived and died princes and patriots. But this skills not—when De Mowbray is rebel and traitor, we will put *for* and *against* in the balance. Meanwhile, Sir Knight, upon this rock our bark of covenant anchors or splits. Make choice, therefore, and speedily."

"Oh, but softly, gentle fisher of dark waters," said the Baron, "fling me not an unbaited hook, I pray you. What, upon *thy* part, dost thou promise me as a countervail?"

"Much," answered Matilda. "First, aid and abettance, such as thou dream'st not of, in this matter of lion-like wooing—and last, a friend within the walls of Bamborough, when thou hast most need of such, one so potent that, if thine own folly prevent it not, De Mowbray shall pardon even the spiriting hence of his daughter; and, to the boot of fair cheek and bright eye, thou shalt have every fief, English or Norman, that swells the dower of Constance. Methinks, great Sir, the latter will be the sweetest drop in the cup, if thine own towers and oxgangs beyond sea fall into other hands."

"How mean ye by that?" said De Lacy in some surprise.

"Had'st thou not a fair Barony called Mans, De Lacy?"

"I had, and have;" he replied, "and so God keep me as I will keep it, while there is gate to bar, and bounding-wall to man."

"Then," said the Lady, "bar well thy gates, and man thy bounding-walls heedfully; for, by my faith, the same evil bird which croaked to thee, however falsely, the chance of Matilda becoming a royal ward, hath sung a worse song in *her* ear touching thy over-sea territories, De Lacy. The evil burden thereof is that, in brief space, King William will seize with strong hand upon the barony of Mans, if thou dost not bend the submissive knee, and cry, dutifully, 'take all, my sovereign liege!'"

"I will bend the knee upon hell-threshold first!" exclaimed the Baron, in fierce accents, and starting suddenly to his feet, while, upon his swarthy brow, a large and crimson spot rose and expanded rapidly.

He remembered at that instant an expression of the Monarch's, which, although qualified and

ambiguous, and uttered during the dance of the wine-cup, seemed now, when coupled with the assertions of Matilda, to bear an alarming significance. Her authority for the rumour would, he conceived, be no other than Hugh-le-Loup, hitherto, or, at least, until very recently, sufficiently in the royal favour to become depositary of more important secrets. The proud spirit of the Feudatory rose in bitter wrath at this suggestion of meditated violence on the part of his Suzerain.

“ If it be thus ——” he muttered.

“ Nothing like proof,” rejoined the Dame. “ Taste and try. Say that thou hast thoughts of snatching thy soul from Satan, by taking the cross, under the banner of Godfrey of Bouillon, and pray King William for a pledge that thy lands and castles be left at peace the whilst. Say thus, and mark his answer.”

“ By St. Mary, it is well said ! ” replied the Baron ; “ and if his royal word of surety be not fair and full—ha ! ——” A stern sparkle of the eye and compression of the lips eloquently filled up the break in this exclamation. He then turned hastily to Matilda—

" Well, gentle Damoiselle, I were a sorry gallant not to make treaty with thee upon thine own terms ; let us sign and seal," he added, kissing her hand with a sort of forced gaiety ; " Constance de Mowbray shall travel in other paths than she wots of, this coming night ; I will have her in fast holding ere cock-crow."

" I," said Matilda, " will give thee timely note by what paths it is purposed she shall away ; and look, De Lacy, her champion is one of those faithful fools who must needs ' do their devoir,' as ye chivalrous saints phrase it—one that will keep him busy-handed until he be cleft to the brain ;—if thou canst serve him in that wise, do it and spare not ; or, at the least, have him speedily within stone and lime, for he hath that in him which is dangerous, and must not again set foot upon Northumbrian earth, far less within the towers of Bamborough."

" Despardieux !" cried the Baron, as if suddenly bethinking him, " this is he, and none other, that braved us all in the castle this gloomy morning—the very brazen and fiery-fronted villain that mouthed it so in the teeth of the king

himself, and had well nigh swung over the drawbridge for the murder of De Waleric."

"Well nigh?" exclaimed Matilda, "Mary-mother! and what held him from the blessing? whose luckless hand saved him from Limbo lake?"

"One that seemed to have scrambled up from its black banks himself, flung thereon, as we all thought, by De Mowbray's lance, at Gloucester, some six winters agone. But Alberic du Coci lives and laughs, and hath saved De Mowbray's varlet from a hempen gorget."

"And well and wisely," answered the Lady; "the wings of De Mowbray's hate will moult a pen-feather for that."

"Not one," said De Lacy: "they will fly the fiercer and faster; he hath done good service to Appylon, but broken the pate of Satan—cleared the varlet, but blackened the Earl. I mean, Lady, he hath flung blood-guiltiness upon De Mowbray as freely in Winchester to-day, as treason heretofore in Gloucester; maugre his rent mail and broken bones in the lists of that fair city. There is nothing now for him, but to cast in his lot with those who make head against Earl Robert."

"Against Earl Robert," repeated Matilda, laying her hand significantly upon the pilgrim's sleeve, "and his fair *son* that shall be, and other knightly and noble ones, *yet* nameless to thy ear. Style it thus, Reginald de Lacy, and——but hark!" for, as she spoke, they heard the last swell of a chaunt terminating another of the solemn services of the day.

"The close of that holy screaming," continued Matilda, "foretels the coming of the Abbess, as the third flourish of a trumpet precedes the entree of a champion. Get thee hence, good ally, and boune thee for thy exploit of to-night. I will talk further with thee ere curfew-bell. Don thy sheep's clothing, Sir Wolf, and away!"

De Lacy was not desirous of playing the pilgrim in the keen eyes of the Mother Abbess. He drew the cowl hastily over his stern visage, waved a sudden adieu to Matilda, and departed with a quicker step and a more erect carriage than his assumed character rendered either natural or prudent.

CHAPTER VII.

" See Protean Paulo in another shape."

" *A Very Woman.*"—*Massinger.*

THE stream of our narrative unites itself once more with that of the individual fortunes of Cœur d'Acier.

The *very* brave contrive to submit with a good grace to the hand of death ; but the *very* bravest, be it observed, are exceedingly well pleased to step back, if possible, and enjoy a little longer reprieve from its cold clutch. We left Raymond bounding from the hall in which he had undergone so trying an investigation, and escaped so fearful a peril, with the lightness of a fawn clearing a petty fence. He sprang from out the gloom of the ribbed portal, and over the sounding drawbridge, like one impatient again to plant his foot upon the free earth, and to look upward with an eye of joyous greeting, instead of bitter valediction, to the blue Heavens, which had so recently

been well nigh blotted for ever from his gaze. It seemed as if a spirit lifted him from the earth, as he sped once more from the Castle-bounds, to those of his monastic hostel in Newan Mynstre.

There—with something, perhaps, of the clown's feeling in the comedy, that “the stable was the only part of the mansion he could call his own,” he betook him, at once, to the region of rack and manger, in which a round score of well-conditioned steeds did great honour to the conventional system of *menage* and stableship.

In the first stall, patting and petting a horse of no mean promise, stood Torfin Paganel.

We have shewn that little love or confidence was at any time lost between these gallants, and may add, that, at the present moment, their salutations, with the sneeringly interchanged epithets of “gentle” and “gallant,” had, at least, a hundred parts of irony for one of cordial meaning.

“And in what wise,” said the Squire of the Body, “hast thou been cheating Satan and Time since yester-eve? ha, gallant Torfin!”

“Pitifully enough, gentle Raymond,” replied He of the Chambers—“meat and mass—horse-tending and psalm-singing; these have been all my pastime in this mansion of dreamy dolour.

Truly, if I could twangle a gittern for everlasting, I had as lief be in Heaven at once."

"Nay," replied Raymond, "that were a weary place for thee. But, rejoice, there is change upon the wing, and hold thee in readiness for a dark ride. What of the doughty Hildebrand and his archers? hath he kept faith with thee touching the matter of the wine-pot?"

"Marvellously," replied Torfin, "for one of his gifts—Duly and truly as the clink of a convent bell he hath shown me his rubicond visage at one or other of the four gates, and with never a fresh star in its burning sky. Marry, I had sworn lustily that he amongst them who gave pot and flaggon the upper hand of discretion, should be hanged in jack and gambeson over the castle drawbridge:—I mean in York or Bamborough, not here in Winchester." And with a right malicious significancy did the eye of Master Torfin Paganel twinkle upon his companion, as he thus alluded to the narrowly-escaped "*petit pendement bien jolie*" of the morning.

"Hang all deservers," said Raymond, unwillingly, "and hemp shall slay more than steel. But I have yet a better use than hanging for

Hildebrand—aye, and for thee, Torfin.—Look well to thy horse-gear and body-array, for we shall scarce part hence without blows."

"Good. But whither away again, so fair and fast?"

"To the north gate I ; this, methinks, is the hour to lay charge upon our jolly archers." And thus saying, Raymond addressed him *en pale-frenier*, and bitted, saddled, and mounted, with fiery dispatch.

"By St. George, Raymond," cried Torfin, glancing at Du Coci's steed, "there is never a hair of thy red roan upon the body of that prancer!"

"Tush!" answered the Cavalier, "it was elfin-changed upon the journey hither, and may again be red as a rose ere night. Away, my gallant one!" and, instantly upon clearing the convent bounds, the full-fed courser bounded off with a rapidity according well with the mood of the excited rider. The streets, both cross and main, and crowded as they were, vanished from before him, but ere he could pull bridle at the castle-barbican, his attention was drawn by a yet louder clattering of hoofs behind. He turned, and saw two horsemen, keeping, by main dint of rod and rowel, their jaded coursers at a speed which

betokened extreme haste. Both men and horses were literally embossed with foam, upon which the dust of the summer roads was converting itself into a semi-liquid, that streaked with no beautifying tints the furniture alike of biped and quadruped. These hurrying cavaliers were almost abreast of Raymond before he distinguished, in the first, his quondam friend, Nicholas de L'Epée, whose glowing visage, quick, restless eyes, and goodly projecting nose, glared through the muddy streams of perspiration, not unlike the grotesque visage of some heraldic monster, grinning deep *gules* through the bars of a portcullis *sable*. His companion was a thin, tall, muscular, brawny-looking fellow, armed to the teeth, and with very much the air of one who would strike murderously for whosoever paid best.

“Friend Raymond!” cried the panting and puffing Nicholas—“Oh, if thou hast Christian charity in thee, take me, I beseech thee, (horse and all, if thou wilt,) and fling me into the Itchin !”

“Nay,” replied Cœur d'Acier, “here is the moat, and ‘*at hand, quoth Pickpurse!*’”

“Pah! mud and slime—as well hang me over

the bridge at once ! it is for the deep deliciousness of the cold clear stream—a long unbreathing draught—that I am praying ! My throat is a seven-times heated furnace—my blood is baked to a red jelly—a score of fire-brands are in my lungs—my very heart is a seething pan—my tongue will be a-blaze ere I am done telling thee of it ! and all for thee, thou pitiless son of Mahound ! ”

“ For me ! thou riddling Termagaunt ! ” said Raymond, “ why, whenever didst thou fret stirrup-leather upon errand of mine, I pray thee ? ”

“ I have fretted stirrup-leather and heart-strings, aye, my very bowel-cords, to be here and at thy beck ! ” replied Nicholas.

“ Grammercy for thy bowels ! I would thou hadst compassion in them for my dulness, and would’st expound this riddle.”

“ Oh, wilful buzzard ! wilt not perceive ? hast thou forgotten the Sorcerer ? are there not goodly caracutes in Essex ? fair oxgangs of arable and meadow ? with mills and osier-grounds, and the fiend knows what ? Are there not bright shekels bidden for the same ? and is not the hour coming at a hand-gallop when these things shall be under the white wax ? ”

"A fiend draw the tooth that bites it!" exclaimed Raymond,* "if thou hast plied rod and rowel on *that* score, bring me to speech of thy lord, and I will entreat for a whole butt of Rhenish to scour the fiery dust out of thy gullet. I would speak, too, with the good Sir Alberic upon mine own part——"

"Very like," said Nicholas; "but tarry and fast, good stranger, until they of the house be fed. I must do mine own turn first, come next who will."

"Nay, thou mayst do mine, too, in a breath," said Raymond, "it is but to commend me to thy master in all grateful courtesy, and to note to him that this goodly prancer is delivered to the safe keeping of his palefrenier."

"Sir," replied Nicholas, with affected stateliness, "we of my lord's household be men of action, and of divers trusts and offices. I say not to you, just now, *who* is master of the horse, palefrenier, varlet, or coistrel; but *this* I say, make my lord's saddle quit of thy courteously grateful body, and betake thee to the trysting

* " And for token that this is sooth,
I bite the white wax with my tooth."

place ye wot of.—Oh, Raymond ! Raymond ! thou mayst bless Heaven and our Lady, and this gallant in the marvellously rusty mail—(who turned me back with feet beautiful on the mountains, mid-way 'twixt hence and Dover)—thou mayst bless all these, I say, that I am not now, in thy very pinch and extremity, shivering afar from thee on the sea-beach, instead of sweating here in Winchester for thy proper advantage. Away with thee ! ”

And thus saying he seized the reins from the dismounted Raymond, and vanished immediately through the barbican, followed by his uncouth companion.

We have made our readers better acquainted with the various personages who figure in this veritable history than the said personages had yet become with each other. For instance, Raymond Cœur d'Acier, in spite of as keen and quick an eye for most matters as any gallant in Britain, had yet failed to detect in Jodesac's merchant-visitors the Red King and his subtle Justiciary. Not feeling ourselves imperatively called upon to account for this unwonted dulness of perception, we pass on, and assume the privilege of laying the blindness of the sharp-sighted

upon the same strange shelf of anomalies with
the

"Fears of the brave, and follies of the wise."

Suffice it that Raymond had yet no suspicion of the identity we speak of. It was therefore with no altered or increased interest that he beheld the disguised pair, habited exactly as before, pacing a little in advance of him, as he directed his steps towards the Jewry.

Anything but delighted with the business pending between the Rabbi and these haughty children of traffic, he looked "*not lovingly,*" as the poet says, upon the latter parties—surveying their persons, probably, much as Yorick did the exterior of his dapper Host at Calais, when he followed him to the Remise Depôt, and "*cursed him by his gods.*"

By this time, Winchester presented a yet more hilarious and jocund aspect (if possible) than before. There had been a considerable influx of all the higher elements of pageantry, civil, military and ecclesiastical, to say nothing of inferior ingredients—mimes, jestours, gleemen, outlaws, and so forth. The day, too, had been one of that lovely and unclouded order which tempts all ranks and ages "*to glitter in the*

beam," and, in consequence, every street of the White City, but, more especially "the High," was thronged to excess. Raymond had therefore some difficulty in keeping his new acquaintances in view, but, not doubting that their destination was his own, he held on in the direction of Jodesac's, until a chance glimpse shewed him that his leaders had changed their course. They turned towards the south gate, and passing through it to the extremity of a long and populous suburb, paused upon an open space of grassy verdure, a little off the main road, and in the centre of which a considerable crowd had collected.

Raymond lackeyed the heels of the disguised Monarch until he was sufficiently near this assemblage to perceive the various and rather discordant materials which composed it, and that the natural esplanade of smooth turf which they occupied, was the present scene of athletic and military sport—of wrestling, archery, quarter-staff, and running at the Quintain.* These la-

* THE QUINTAIN. A post, or carved figure (generally a Saracen, armed) against which the sportsmen directed their lances, so as to strike it, if possible, between the eyes. Failing in this, any other stroke occasioned the quintain to swing round upon a pivot, and disgrace the bungler by a blow of his club.

borious games were relieved at intervals by convivial indulgence, for which the appliances were heaped upon a huge table, or substitute for that luxury ; while forms, or settles, of equally primitive construction, flanked it on every side, like the bounding walls of a rude fortalice.

The carousers were men of all ages and professions, lay and cleric. There were soldiers, pilgrims, and pardoners—burgesses and frank-lins—rustics and mechanics. But all these distinctions, perhaps, merged in the paramount ones of NORMAN and SAXON ; *castes* separated by such waters of bitterness as effectually cut off all perfectly social communion. It was obvious that these great national opposites had their representatives in the present assemblage, and that, if the Norman portion comprised the more influential by rank and station, the Saxon had the advantage in point of numbers.

At the instant of their being joined by Raymond, and those who involuntarily drew him thither, a loud shout proclaimed the triumph of a Norman archer, who, for the third time, had sent a shaft from a considerable distance into the *clout* or exact centre of a target fixed at

one extremity of the ground. This feat, which filled his party with clamorous exultation, seemed to close the trials of archer-craft for a while : the whole body moving towards the festive board, escorting the victor triumphally, and formally installing him in the seat of honour at the head of the banqueting table.

“ Spanish yew and the Norman bow-hand for ever ! ” shouted a ruby-visaged lover of venery and woodcraft—“ Saw ever mortal man fairer archery than that ! ”

“ Fairer ? ” iterated another and more grim-looking encomiast—“ He that boasts him to have seen fairer, if he be a *Norman*, let him thank God for a goodly sight—if a *Saxon*—by St. Anthony’s sow, he is a bacon-fed braggart, and a lying churl ; and we will scourge the vaunting humour out of him with a swine’s tail ! ”

“ Ha ! ha ! ha ! ” roared the Norman party, in obstreperous triumph at this threatening witticism of their champion.

“ Ha ! ha ! ha ! ” laughed another voice, as if in bitter mockery, and only making itself audible when the mirth of others was silent.

The grim speaker thus defied—for a defiance the scornful laugh seemed intended to convey—turned fiercely in that direction, and glared with fiery eyes upon one whose countenance left no doubt that he was the author of the cachinnatory insult. This individual, whose dress was that of an ordinary churl, or *villein*, had yet nothing of the debased and down-looking aspect of the oppressed serfs of the period. He sat erect and fearless, confronting his challenger with a half stern, half contemptuous indifference, which, borne out as it was by a great appearance of muscular strength, a broad full chest, sinewy arms and hands, and other indications both of the power and the will to resist, bespoke him plainly “no babe to struggle with.”

All eyes were immediately upon him, with the right gladiator feeling of an English mob, keenly expectant of a struggle. But there was one who looked with startled recognition, for Raymond's first glance told him that his mysterious monitor and accuser—he of the forest, the dungeon, and the castle-hall—was again before him, and in another of his Protean shapes. The King and the Justiciary also detected their quondam

acquaintance, and, with an exchange of glances, drew near to the parties who thus promised to fall into such entertaining collision.

“ Ho—ho—ho ! ” iterated the Norman, in ireful mimicry, “ canst thou not laugh in fairer fashion than *that*, Lob-lie-by-the-fire ? ”

“ Not when I laugh at *thee*,” replied the Saxon.

“ Sayest thou me so ! ” exclaimed the other, starting up ; “ by St. Winifred, but thou shalt though ! Shew me thy ragged jaw-teeth again in such grinning wise, and I will dash them down thy villainous throat with my dagger-haft ! ”

“ Work thy pleasure with the *haft*,” replied the descendant of Hengist, with a calm bitterness, “ and I will find thee a new sheath for the *blade* ; thou shalt wear it nearer thy heart than thy girdle.”

Trebly enraged, and no whit intimidated by this counter-threat, the Norman bounded across the festive board, flung himself upon the object of his passion, and would, no doubt, have “ tickled him other gates,” had not that individual, still keeping his sitting posture in the

most provoking calmness, extricated himself with a giant's wrench, and hurled the aggressor from him as if never again to rise from the embrace of Mother Earth. The deadly emphasis of the fall, however, was broken by those around. After again regaining the firm foot, he stood for an instant as if bewildered with surprise and rage; then, drawing a two-edged knife of formidable length and keenness, sprang once more upon the Saxon with equal fierceness and agility. Far from limiting himself to the original terms of his threat, he now put the dagger-haft to its legitimate use, and would, perhaps, have given the sharp blade a gory sheath, had not the blow been arrested by another of our early acquaintances, namely, the Harper of the Forest, who, with his diminutive attendant, Elfin Puckfist, had joined the carousing party.

Abandoning his instrument to the dwarf, the Minstrel sprang betwixt the Norman and his victim, exclaiming as he withheld the struggling hand,

“ Ho ! gently, for our Lady's sake ! have we murder here over the ale-cup ? ”

“ What is that to thee, Sir Twang-the-git-

tern?" exclaimed the Hero of the Target, taking up the quarrel of his angry encomiast, as a matter rightly pertaining to himself, "hold off thy jack-an-ape fingers, or, by St. Hubert! we will drug thee with a like posset."

"Physic the sick," exclaimed the pertinacious Minstrel; "I am hale of body, and will neither swallow such drugs myself, nor see them thrust, *wold he, n'old he*, down the maw of another, if I can help it."

"Help it, then, at thy peril, or if thou canst," replied the archer; and seizing the lover of sweet song by the arm (aided at the same time by the ready hands of others), he dragged him with equal suddenness and fury apart. This was scarcely accomplished before the liberated assailant again rushed upon the object of his resentment, and again, to the astonishment of the beholders, was thrown, or rather, *hurled* off by the stern, vigorous, unwounded Saxon—much as a boy of ten might be repelled by the manly arm of thirty. It was, however, no part of the humour of this mysterious being to play passive *ad libitum*, for the sole amusement of others. He now sprang, in turn, upon his reeling aggres-

sor, wrenched the dagger from his hand, and would certainly have cured him for ever of brawling and stabbing, had not Raymond followed the example of the Minstrel, however ill-relished by those around, and arrested his uplifted arm. Perhaps the young Squire's peculiar feelings towards this puzzling acquaintance were not without their influence in the tremendous gripe he retained, and a strange expression shot over the Saxon's features, as he turned and saw whose iron sinews fettered his own.

"More blood?" said Raymond, in low significant tones.

"Aye, for more scorn of the Saxon!" said the stranger—"and *thine—thine*—when thou hast heaped full the measure of wrong and insult! I, THE AVENGER, tell thee so! *once* have I spared thee—*once* hast thou escaped me—but the hour comes——"

"It *hath* come, for *thee*—thou dark and devilish one!" rejoined Cœur d'Acier, deepening his grasp to something like the inveteracy of a smith's vice—"I have thee *now*, and, by my patron saint, I will know more of thee before thou art again a shooter in the greenwood—a

goblin in dungeon cells, or a frocked liar in castle halls!—”

This bitter colloquy, rapid in its utterance, was broken by a simultaneous rushing together of the two parties, Norman and Saxon, which speedily converted the individual scuffle into a general *meleé*. The Minstrel, on the one side, and, on the other, he who had been the first to meddle with cold iron, were instantly rescued by their respective partisans. Weapons of various kinds were drawn and flourished, and blows and thrusts exchanged with great heartiness. Fortunately, however, all this was without any serious phlebotomy or bone-disturbing, and before matters had time to assume a worse aspect, the disguised King and his Justiciary thought proper to interfere. They came to this resolution hastily, but not cordially. Flambard, the advocate of placability when nothing was to be gained by quarrelling, urged immediate prevention ; but the amused King, wishing to enjoy all the immunities of his incognito, breathed the less Christian spirit of “ Fight dog—fight bear,” and laughed hoarsely and heartily at the vulgar tournament.

"Nay, but this cutting and thrusting passes a jest," said the Minister.

"Tush," replied Rufus, "let the pudding-headed villains brawl themselves sober. By the beard of Benedict, I would jeopard a moiety of Jodesac's shekels (Heaven make them ours!) to see yonder prating minstrel put to his fence against De Mowbray's varlet."

"A *Minstrel's* fence!" said Ranulph, "as well talk of a monk's modesty! Who ever heard, saving amongst the wild Welsh, of a minstrel *fighting*? at least since the days of Taillefer,* at Hastings' field; and he was rapped on the head incontinently for his pains. Why—look ye! 'tis even so—the ballad-monger will none on't—he holds off hand from sharpened iron—he will break no hedges, lest a serpent bite him."

"Oh Ranulph! Ranulph!" cried the Monarch, "art thou too amongst the buzzards? Yonder ballad-monger, as thou hast termed him—but let thine own eyes do their own work—and, if it

* A minstrel in William's army, who rushed into the thick of the fight, singing the song of Roland, and fell gallantly in the first charge.

must be so, play we the peace-makers—ho !
peace ye knaves !”

And he thrust himself between the belligerents as if with ribs of iron, shouting “ Peace ho !” in a voice that rang like the peal of a trumpet, and induced a dead suspension of hostilities.

“ My masters !” exclaimed Flambard, the instant fair hearing could be obtained, “ are ye mad ? or drunk with double ale of the devil’s brewing ? Why, what black *sanctus* is this for Christian men with souls to be saved, if they have grace or luck ? Heard ye never that a live dog is better than a dead lion ? Clap me every man his Tranchero * into the scabbard, and that goodly part of his body which I name not, for reverence, once more upon his seat ; and we that be men of peace and substance will thereupon play the *magnificos*, and be at cost to brim your flaggons again with the mightiest ale that Winchester hath in butt. Shall it be even so, brother mine ?”

“ Aye, but methinks,” said Rufus, “ they thirst for a purple rather than a brown beverage.

* In the old romances the name of the sword of Agrican.

as if there were no holiday-keeping without throat-cutting. What knowest thou of archery; that art so fain to thrust and stab for the glory thereof? thou with the iron pot upon thy brainless sconce?"

He of the iron pot however,—the angry assailant of the Saxon, had, by this time, caught a glance which at once drew the angel of consideration to whip the offending Adam out of him. He fell back amongst the crowd with very much the air of one who had no desire to be further commented upon. The doughty Hildebrand, in fact, for he it was, shrank from the reproving gaze of Raymond, in the full consciousness of having transgressed bounds and orders.

Meanwhile the work of recognition was going on with a like stultifying effect upon others, for not only did the gentle minstrel, after a steady gaze at the *soi-disant* merchants, evince a desire to depart suddenly, but the mysterious Saxon also, put himself modestly upon the retrograde, "staying no further question."

William the Red, however, was not disposed to part company thus.—

"Tarry!" he exclaimed to both, with the

accents of command few could listen to rebelliously. “A word of each in turn, I pray you ; be it but in honour of our proffered cheer.”

“Command thy mules, Sir Merchant, and feast thy slaves !” said the Saxon—“I tarry not, although the flaggons were brimmed with costly wine rather than sorry ale.”

“Wine, saidst thou ?” exclaimed Rufus, “Forsooth, a dainty churl ! but, it may be, this villainous garb belies thy fairer condition. Methinks, Gaffer, I have had traffic with thee ere now ; and this is not the first matter of *archery* in which I have seen *thee* an angry man, ha ?”

“Ye talk of archery, Sir Merchant !” said a stout fellow, in gambeson and steel cap, little wotting whom he thus boldly interrupted, “I will tell ye a fairfeat therein that mine own eyes beheld, upon the Welsh Marches. Wet, and weary, and famished, we were stumbling, like over-driven oxen, through a villainous mountain pass ; and the Welsh wolves had beset the inner end thereof, and the hollows and the clefts and the crag-tops ; whereby, my masters, or whereupon, (whichsoever be most clerkly,) before we could couch a lance, or wield a mallet, there

came a whistling hurricane of cloth-yard shafts, (ye know the length of a cloth-yard, Sir Merchants, I warrant ye) and they tickled our foremost gallants through mail and plastron, to the very heart and midriff! I promise ye it was bow-craft to make a man grin on the wrong side of his mazzard. But of all rarities with bended yew, by Butts and Rovers! these eyes of mine (a fiend pick them out if I lie!) these eyes, I say, beheld a Norman knight, hot Ralph de Limesi, pinned to his red-roan * with a shaft from thigh to thigh! through man's flesh and horse-flesh—I say, through left thigh and right thigh, and the steed's belly to boot! Aha! Sir Merchants, and good fellows all, *that* was proper archery, and a fair sight to look and laugh at, had there been time therefor!"

While the military ear of Rufus was thus occupied, the more politic Justiciary listened to the stern Saxon, as the latter replied to his admonitory hints of departure.

"Wert thou in cowl and cassock, good friend," said Ranulph, "I would say, '*keep not thy place when the spirit of the Ruler is against*'

* *Fact*, according to Giraldus Cambrensis.

thee,' hast thou clerkly knowledge of such a rede, ha ? "

"Aye," replied the Saxon, "the rede of him who said also, '*I have seen Princes walking like servants upon the earth.'*'"

"Go to then," answered Flambard, convinced by this that their incognito had been penetrated; "thou knowest whose favour is as the morning dew, and whose wrath as the roaring of the lion."

The Unknown glanced around him, and gave a mute signal to one who stood near, holding by the rein a coal-black courser.

"Dog of a Saxon!" cried the King at last, and with little heed to the character he assumed. "Thou wilt not tarry the grace-cup, ha? get thee to kennel, then! but I swear to thee, before long thou shalt pledge me in other wise; I will have thee a dweller in strange chambers!"

"A dweller I in the free forest, with mine own free thoughts!" said the threatened one, his eye kindling, and his cheek taking a more pallid hue.

"Aye, and a shooter of free shafts at other

men's deer, I warrant thee!" rejoined the Monarch.

"Nay, but, brother mine," interrupted Flambard, "'*non est inquirendum*' thou knowest, '*unde venit venison.*'" *

"At least," said the insulted Saxon, confronting the Sovereign with unabashed brow, "I have seen deadly shooting upon *thy* warrenry, Sir Merchant; and all for the love of woodcraft, not venery. It was a brave quarry that yesternoon cumbered the turf until passers-by housed it beneath thy own roof-tree! Let others of the proud herd that even now are tossing their frontlets to the scorned heavens, and rioting in the pastures of the robbed Saxon—let them, I say, beware of a like deadly shaft! from a thousand and a thousand quivers the hand of vengeance shall speed it forth. Tyrant! and lord of tyrants! follow, and I will shew thee the slayer of De Waleric!"

Instantly as a midnight landscape is revealed to the traveller by the broad lightning sheet, the Monarch stood confessed to Raymond! the first impulse of both, perhaps, was to rush upon

* Old forest adage.

the insolent avoucher of his own dark deeds and

“Slay him where he stood !”

but that mysterious one did *not* stand either to be slain or threatened : as the last words foamed upon his lip, he bounded to the side of his ready courser, sprang with fierce haste into the saddle, and almost before a replying tone could reach him, was in headlong gallop from the spot. In vain did Rufus shout “To horse and chase !” In vain did Raymond feel as if he would have given the world to obey. The wealth of Croesus could not just then have commanded the service of better quadrupeds than one or two huge dogs, already, with useless clamour, plying both lungs and legs in the pursuit.

“Tut,” said Flambard, “let him pass—the poor groom is lunatic. Which of ye know aught concerning him? *thou, belike,*” turning to the Minstrel, “that wert so fain to champion him; madman and Minstrel are of likely kin.”

“*My* kin, Sir Merchant,” replied the child of song, “are of other strain and in other lands. I knew him not; neither did I care to see human flesh and blood thrust through like carrion, be-

cause, forsooth, he laughed not to other men's liking."

"Carrión!" exclaimed the Monarch, "I would thou hadst been cut into gobbets for the kennel thyself, before thy busy hand thrust betwixt him and fate! I tell thee, thou jingling gull! thy beastly pitifulness hath robbed this youth, and others, of the just payment of a debt of blood. Thou hast made thyself surety for him—how answerest, ha? Canst brandish weapon thyself?"

"*I* brandish weapon!" responded the Minstrel in alarm, real or feigned, "a man of peaceful song! Let me hence, I pray you—sharp steel ices my blood."

"Pah!" exclaimed the disgusted Rufus, "get thee from under my nostrils. The rank stench of such another coward would breed the falling-sickness amongst us. Hast thou the limbs and thews of a man, and scarcely the heart of a pigeon?"

"God hath made me of tender clay :" answered the Minstrel, whose noble form and admirable features presented the strongest possible contrast to his pusillanimous words—"Let me hence," he added, "a stranger I, and a peaceful—what,

Elfin ! ho ! thou dreamer ! up and away ! 'tis time, by'r Lady—

The owl from his tod—
And the bat from his shed—
The lark to her sod—
And the Minstrel to bed !

What, Puckfist ! when, I say ? St. Mary ! if ye would have battle, *here* is your proper champion," and as the mantle under which he had lain en-sconced was plucked away, that unlovely epitome of the human composition, Elfin Puckfist, arose in the full majesty of forty inches.

The apparition of the ungainly mannikin arising to the tune of such a panegyric, threw the whole assembly into laughter. Even the provoked King lent his hoarse burden to the general chorus ; and Flambard, well pleased to see the current of the royal temper take a gentle turn, exclaimed aloud—

" By the charmed blade of King Pellenore ! it is no marvel the gentle Minstrel keeps God's peace and the King's, with such a champion at his back ! Sit to thy harp, good fellow, and let us hear thee blazon the deeds of this doughty warrior, until they that bring the mighty ale arrive with their blessed burden."

The Minstrel obeyed ; and whether the hero of the following lay may be identified with Elfin Puckfist, such as we have described him, must rest between the lyric veracity of his master, and the judgment or credulity of the reader.

THE DWARP OF CARILBYNE.

1.

" Why leanest thou by that aged tree,
O Dwarf of Carilbyne ?
And why is the tear in thy hollow e'e,
That wont so bright to shine ?
Thy raven-locks are flying dark
On the blast that whistles by,
Like riven cords of the stranded bark,
When winds and waves are high—
What grief hath stricken thee or thine,
O weeping Dwarf of Carilbyne ?

2.

" Where be the bright robes thou hast worn ?
And where thine aspect mild ?
Those loathly weeds are rude and torn,
Thy looks are wan and wild !
When I did gaze upon thee last,
Thou satt'st in gallant trim,
On a fiery courser prancing past,
Full stout of heart and limb.
Then whence this woful change of thine,
O weeping Dwarf of Carilbyne ?"

3.

" And dost thou, Wanderer, bid me tell
 Why the tear is in mine e'e?
 Why, lone and sullen, I list to dwell,
 And lean by this aged tree?
 Oh, hic thee, wanderer, on thy way,
 And wrap thee from the cold;
 The winds shall bleach my raven locks grey
 Ere that dark tale be told!
 Thou mayst not know this grief of mine—"
 Quoth the weeping Dwarf of Carilbyne.

4.

Up spoke the wanderer again—
 " When last I gazed on thee,
 Thou loneliest of lonely men,
 How blythe thou seem'dst to be!
 Thou rodst a red-cross knight behind,
 In fair array bedight;
 His white plume wantoned with the wind,
 His arms were flashing bright.
 Then, where that stately lord of thine,
 O weeping Dwarf of Carilbyne?

5.

" And by his side a Lady fair
 On a milk-white palfrey rode;
 I wot they were a lovely pair
 As e'er in Britain yode.*
 Adown her form her glossy hair
 In reckless beauty flowed!
 The diamond sheen that sparkled there
 Not half so beauteous show'd—
 Then, where that Lady bright of thine,
 O weeping Dwarf of Carilbyne?

* Yode, Went.

6.

" I marked them ride at evening tide,
When the sun was in the west,
By yonder welling fountain's side,
Where weary pilgrims rest;
And there an aged man did stay
His trembling limbs, to drink ;
His locks, with cold all hoary grey,
Hung o'er the fountain's brink.
Why followed he that lord of thine,
O weeping Dwarf of Carilbyne ? "

7.

" Alas ! no aged man was he,
Nor pilgrim weak and worn ;
My bitterest curse upon him be,
A guilty wretch forlorn !
The curse to roam eternally,
And eternally to mourn ;—
To sue for death on bended knee,
And grieve he e'er was born !
He caus'd these bitter tears of mine,"
Quoth the weeping Dwarf of Carilbyne.

8.

" I weep for those who never more
Shall weep or smile again ;
I weep, who little wept before,
Nor wept for others then.
This woman's mood will soon be o'er,
Vain tears, and vainer speech !
My tears may dry, but drops of gore
Full soon shall flow for each !
A bitter vengeance shall be mine ! "
Quoth the weeping Dwarf of Carilbyne.

9.

" But hie thee, Wanderer, on thy way,
 Nor idly linger here ;
 'Tis long to peep of morning grey.
 The night is murk and drear.
 One deed of blood hath passed away,
 Another yet is near !
 No more these anguish'd lips shall say,
 No more 'tis thine to hear.
 Go, stranger, go ; fair speed be thine ! "
 Quoth the weeping Dwarf of Carilbyne.*

As the deep and mellow tones of the singer died away, a profound stillness sank upon the mixed auditory, and held place alike of song and speech—of laugh and threat. Such, in fact, was the impression conveyed by the rude ballad that the performer departed, with his uncouth attendant, even without the farewell greeting of a jest.

The Monarch and his favourite effected their retreat under cover of the beverage for which they had pledged themselves to the wassailers ;

* It is probable that a reader or two, here and there, may have met before with the above ballad. It was once printed obscurely in the provinces, to swell out the scanty volume of a rhyming friend, and afterwards copied into a magazine in town.

and, as Raymond followed in the royal wake, the original parties were left to carouse and brawl at pleasure ; to empty as many flaggons, and break as many heads as they thought proper.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Hast thou forgotten all thy friends in the Jewry? or dost thou think us all Jews that inhabit there?"

Every Man in his Humour.

THE feelings with which we perform, or contemplate, at different periods, the very same action are wonderfully modified by that "unspiritual god, Circumstance." He, for instance, who secretly dogs the heels of another, feels pretty much like that proverbial "hearer of nothing good"—the eaves-dropper—and confesses, in the words of Cassio, that, "whoso does these things is unworthy of his place," but his compunction depends greatly upon the *rank* of the individual so listened to, or so followed. Our friend Raymond became conscious of this, in his diminished sense of degradation when the steps in which he thus furtively trode were once known to be those of a great Monarch and his favourite, instead of vulgar traffickers in broad cloth.

They turned, as the Squire expected, into the

Jewry, which quickened his own steps to the place of tryst appointed by De L'Epée.

The ever-merry Nicholas was first upon the ground, and, when his companion approached, lay under the shadow of the far-projecting elm, as happily at his ease as ever was Tityrus under his beech, singing of Amaryllis.

"Why, how now, Goodman Crawl-a-pace!" he exclaimed, "if thou wert not known for one as quick to shed blood as to drink muscadine, I would have thee drawn by the ears through the hoop of a pottle-pot, for a loitering lozel! thou shouldst sing 'Lachrymæ' to a dolorous pipe, in revenge of my cool heels."

"Abate thy wrath, good piper!" said Raymond, "and let me keep mine ears for the matter in yonder vault of the Sorcerer. Briefly, good Nicholas, let us to our station,—the greedy traffickers in oxgangs and caracutes are even now thundering at the wicket."

"Aye, but not with battering ram and catapult, as *one* of them, at least, is like to do upon thy Lord's castle-gate ere long."

"Ha!" exclaimed Cœur d'Acier—"Then thou hast discovered—thy quick eye hath—"

" My quick eye," interrupted Nicholas, " had as little to do with it, as thy slow self. It was the eye of one older and wiser than either thou or I, that saw the lion's mane bristling under the ass's skin—no matter—I have learnt what manner of Merchant seeks gold for those goodly lands in Essex—and moreover, I can see through the mill-stone that covers *thy* interest therein.—Nay, never look as if thou couldst devour me with wonder and curiosity—let pass. I say—and know that, to the boot of all this, I have, in one day's space, done three men worshipful service; firstly—"

" Thy worshipful self, I warrant," interrupted his friend.

" Right as a full flaggon," quoth Nicholas, " and the only one of the three from whom I look to have gratitude therefor. Secondly, my valorous lord and master, Alberic du Coci, and, thirdly, a vain-glorious fellow, y'clept, Raymond of the Heart of Steel. For myself, I have taken heart of grace, and repented me into a huge inheritance. For Sir Alberic, *he* may bless the hour when he carried to the ear of the rich old Israelite news of his vagabond son; and for thee,

sirrah Raymond, know that my penitence hath so dealt with my Sire's money-bags that there is little danger of the lands in Essex falling into his hands to-night, at least if ready shekels be the word of bargain."

"I apprehend thee ;" said the Northern Squire. "Du Coci hath carried thy filial penitence to a profitable market, and the foolish father hath *bought* back his villainous son—ha!"

"Sir," answered Nicholas, "I have gone back to my father, like the prodigal in Holy Writ, but I grant ye the fatted calf may be likened to that of Bethel—it is of *gold*."

"Well," said Raymond, "and how looks Jodesac since he hath learned thy falling away to pork-eating?"

"Come and see," replied Nicholas, starting up; and they descended, as before, into the secret gallery of the stone chamber.

Silence and Solitude were the sole occupants of the rude apartment, and the cresset shed its melancholy beams upon "bare and loathly walls." The intruders, however, had scarcely taken their vantage-ground before the venerable Jew ap-

peared, stooping under the low-browed doorway, and saying, as he entered, to one without, “Conduct them hither, Mordecai, and if they speak unto thee after a gibing fashion, answer not thou again.”

Mordecai obeyed, and the illustrious masqueraders were ushered once more into the presence of the Rabbi.

“Thou seest, good Jodesac, we palter not with thee,” cried the Monarch—“we keep time and tryst. Where then be these monies—these shekels—these blessed coins, ha?”

“Alas! Sir Merchant,” replied the Israelite, “Man talketh, and God doeth: hath not confidence in mortal things been likened unto a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint?”

“It may be so,” returned the Justiciary,—“but we will have confidence in *thee*, good Rabbi, in spite of thy teeth, and whether they be whole or broken; seeing that it is at peril not only of thy *foot-joints*, but of every joint in thy body, that we be dealt with faithfully, and to the uttermost shekel!”

“Let there be no strife betwixt us, I pray

ye," said the old man, calmly—"for, of a surety, this thing must not be. I cannot traffic with ye, Sir Merchant, therefore depart in peace!"

"Why thou circumcised iniquity!" exclaimed the provoked Rufus—"thou unbelieving filth!—"

"Patience, brother," interrupted Flambard—"patience; and do thou, good Israelite, expound unto us, what evil wind hath made thy resolution of yester-even like unto thistle-down, or a rolling thing before the blast?"

"Lo! in dreams," said Jodesac, "have I been forewarned, and a vision of the silent hour hath admonished me—Yea! a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men."

"Dreams and visions!! thou white-bearded abomination!" shouted Rufus, "have we come to thee hungering for *gold*, and dost thou seek to banquet us with the filth of thy beastly *dreams*!"

"Nay, but we will be as meek as Moses with thee," said the more self-possessing Justiciary. "Let us hear *what manner* of dream hath triple-locked thy treasure-chests, and made fast the coffers of thy abundance? It may be that I

can show thee the interpretation thereof, after the fashion of thy prophetic forefathers."

"Behold," said Jodesac, seating himself, and stretching out his arm with an oriental gesture of appeal, "I saw in my dream, and methought, at the going down of the sun I was alone in this poor chamber ; and, of a sudden, the form and the dimensions thereof were changed ; and it became like unto a vast treasure-house, even as though the kings of the earth had fashioned it for their secret stores, and had heaped therein exceeding riches, through a thousand and a thousand years ! The walls, and the roof, and the pillars, and the doors, were of ivory and of silver, and of the gold of Ophir and of Parvaim; and upon the marble floor, I saw many vessels of agate, and of crystal, and of porphyry. and of jasper, wrought marvellously in cunning workmanship, and filled with diamonds and with gems, and with all precious stones, even as the sands of the sea for number, and as the stars of heaven for brightness ; and the sight of mine eyes grew dim with the exceeding glory. Then I marvelled, and fear came upon me, and trembling :

and there was silence ; and I heard a voice, and I knew in my soul that it was the voice of Him who spake temptingly of old to the enduring one of Uz.

“ ‘ Arise, Jodesac,’ it said, ‘ take the joy of thine eye and the delight of thine heart ! for behold, all these treasures will I give thee for the sacrifice of but a little thing,’ and I said, ‘ What is it, Lord ?’—and the voice answered,

“ ‘ Thou shalt take the inheritance of the Orphan for a prey, and for a spoil.’

“ ‘ Nay, but,’ I said, ‘ why doth my Lord counsel this thing ? behold, the orphan cometh for his portion, and when he shall cry aloud to Him that is just and terrible, how shall it be with me ? and how shall mine iniquity be sealed up ?’

“ And the voice answered again, and said,

“ ‘ Will God hearken for ever unto the words of them that cry unto Him ? or will he give thee for thine integrity the riches of the whole earth ? Behold ; it is not for nought that I say unto thee, ‘ Do this ;’ the choice is in thine hand—consider it, Jodesac, and be wise.—’

“ And the glory of the treasure was exceed-

ing great, and mine eye beheld, and mine heart coveted—and the desire of my soul arose."

"Aye!" interrupted the King, "and thou wert wise, Jodesac, and didst buffet aside thy Jewish conscience, and strike the good bargain while it was offered, ha?"

"Peace!" returned the descendant of Abraham, "and thou shalt learn—keep silence, and thou shalt understand.

"Then, I saw in my dream, and, behold, two men stood before me—their garments, and their forms, and their visages were even as yours, O strangers! yea, they were like unto you, and they did offer me the inheritance of the orphan for a prey, and for a spoil—for a price, and for a sum. And I was tempted of the great riches around me, and said,

"Let it be even so—let the inheritance be mine, and take ye treasure for the price thereof.' But, lo! as they stretched forth their hands, it was as if Spirits arose out of the earth—dark and shadowy, and of exceeding stature, and very terrible! and one thereof was as a warrior from a stricken field—as a mighty one from Edom—with dyed garments from Bozrah. Yea,

he was like, methought, unto that Captain of Hundreds who was slain cruelly in the forest yesterday ! ”

“ Ha ! sayest thou ! ” exclaimed the King. “ Yea,” continued the Jew ; “ I did remember me De Waleric ; the fierce eye of his wrath was upon me, and my bones shook, and the hair of mine head arose. Fear also came upon the men beside me—they fled afar off—and methought, as they departed, they were changed mightily, and their raiment was of purple and fine linen, and one thereof had like unto a crown of gold upon his head ! Then I cried aloud, and strove also to flee away ; but terror had made me even as a babe for helplessness ; and the hand of the terrible one was lifted on high to smite me with a dagger ; but of a sudden there came a shadow as of thick darkness, and a sound of roarings and of thunders ; and it was as if a mighty wind had fallen upon the four corners of the house ; that, with the loudness and the terrors thereof, I awoke, and behold it was a dream ! ”

“ And behold,” said the Monarch, indignantly. “ thou art a lying Greybeard ! This is a parable,

and not a vision. Old man, base garments have not hidden from thee thy Sovereign ; and thou hast dared to bring him again upon a bootless quest into thy wretched vault. I will repay thee for it—I will teach thee to palter with a King as with one of thine own accursed brotherhood ! ”

“ Wilt thou break a leaf driven to and fro ? ” said Jodesac, “ behold, threescore-and-ten are the years of my pilgrimage, and the burden of flesh is a weariness unto me. Shall I fear death at thy hand, O King ? ”

“ Thou couldst prate of fearing it,” said the King, “ from the hand of De Waleric, in thy lying vision. Pay me down, even now, the shekels we spake of, or, by my sceptre and my soul, I will see how thy *waking* eyes can endure sharp steel—aye, and thy *waking* flesh ! ”

“ I will defend me,” said the Jew, “ even with De Waleric’s dagger ! ” And, to the astonishment of his visitors, the old man drew a poniard from his vest, adding, “ In this do I neither dream, nor lie, nor speak parables unto thee. This dagger, O King ! did the hand of De Waleric deliver unto mine ; — it shall do bloodless battle for me, for, with a

glance of thine eye, thou shalt know it as a testimony and a token of the Orphan whom, I have truly said, ‘cometh quickly for his inheritance !’ Behold !”

The weapon, a *misericorde* of exquisite workmanship, and of which the finely tempered blade was attached to an elaborately wrought hilt of gold and ivory, set with gems of extraordinary splendour, was in every respect too remarkable to be readily forgotten by whoever had once seen and grasped it.

Rufus, who recognised an old and valued friend, snatched it with an impetuosity only equalled by the eagerness with which he questioned Jodesac respecting its transmission to *his* hand. This examination, however, we need not detail at full. The reader is already aware, no doubt, that the poniard in question was the *talisman* of Raymond—the same given, together with the person of that gallant, by De Waleric, to the safe keeping of Jodesac. All that the Jew could or would relate of the young proprietor was, simply, “Behold, he cometh for his inheritance !” In fact, that he (Jodesac) had been apprised by one “whose ear had heard,

and whose eye had seen,” of the youth’s intention to claim the dagger, and, no doubt, to assert the rights to which it was understood its possession gave him claim.

“ Meantime,” said Rufus, thrusting it into his girdle, “ ourself will play the broker with this fair weapon. Let not the gallant pluck *thy* beard in default thereof, Jodesac, but tell him that he must needs claim it at our hand, and we will deal gently both with him and thee ; ever premising that the shekels come briskly out of thy crammed coffers. Take *that* with thee, thou man of parables, and so farewell ! ”

“ Tarry, great King ! ” exclaimed the Jew, “ and incline thine ear to my prayer. Behold, for a little thing—yea, for a breath of thy lips, I will pour into thy lap more treasure than thou hast yet asked with thy mouth, or coveted with thine heart ! ”

“ Staff of Isaac, and beard of Jacob ! what is it man ? ” cried the King, “ Flambard himself hath not spoken so profitably this many a day. Out with it in the fiend’s name ! ”

“ I am A FATHER, O King,” said the Jew, “ and therein a man of sorrow. The hand of

affliction hath been upon me—yea, even into the cup, which I looked should be as a sweet solace to my aged lips, bitterness hath been poured abundantly. My son—my first born and my last—hath been unto me as a truant and a stranger. Behold, even now, he returns from a far land ; but how shall mine eye look upon him that worships not as his fathers—that hath turned him to the faith of your Prophet of Galilee—the crucified Man of Nazareth !”

“ What ! a Christian ? ” said Rufus, “ translated out of villainous Hebrew into worse Norman ? Now, by Tristam, the great swineherd, and by Coll and Pryderi to boot, he hath sold his birth-right for a mess of pork !—Thou shalt disclaim him, Jodesac ! thou shalt cut him off with a bezant ; and, to console thee like a Christian King, we will ourself be thine heir ! ”

“ Nay, but,” answered he of the promise, with a poor relish of the royal jest, “ it shall come to pass that, when my Lord the King reproveth him, he will hearken to the words of my Lord, and will turn again, and mine eye shall behold him with joy, and my soul shall have solace in him, ere I go hence and be no more seen ! I

affliction hath been upon me—yea, even into the cup, which I looked should be as a sweet wine to my aged lips, bitterness hath been poured abundantly. My son—my first born and my last—hath been unto me as a traitor and a stranger. Behold, even now, he returns from a far land; but how shall mine eye look upon him that worships not as his fathers—that has turned him to the faith of your Prophet of Galilee—the crucified Man of Nazareth!"

"What! a Christian?" said Rufus.—translated out of villainous Hebrew into worse Norman? Now, by Tristam, the great swindler and by Coll and Pryderi to boot, he hath sold his birth-right for a mess of pork!—Thou shalt disclaim him, Jodesac! thou shalt cut him off with a bezant; and, to console thee like a Cym-

say unto thee, O King ! for this will I pour treasure into thy coffers with a bountiful hand."

"And I," answered the Sovereign, "say unto *thee*, Jodesac, that thou sayest well. By Mary-Mother, thy son shall back to the synagogue, though he were sworn a shaveling in Ealden Mynstre ! Methinks, although St. Benedict and a whole chapter of Book-a-bosoms had clutch upon him, the King, the Devil, and the Jew, were a full match for them all. How sayst thou, Ranulph ?"

"I cannot tell ;" answered the Minister ; "as it is, your Grace, I think, may readily pluck him out of steel harness ; but if it were frock and hood, I should remember me the sharp saying, 'if one but offendeth a Monk's *dog*, straight clamoureth the whole brotherhood, 'an heresy ! an heresy !'"

"We would adventure," returned the Monarch, "at peril of bell, book, and candle. Rest ye content, Jodesac—thou hast put thy cause into the hands of a powerful pleader."

And thus did one of the most powerful—aye, and chivalrous—and magnanimous of the sovereigns of Christendom, pledge himself, "for as

much trash as may be grasped at thus," to drive a convert to the Christian faith back to the stubborn unbelief of his fathers.

Meanwhile, how felt the clandestine auditors of all this strange discussion—the silent listeners of the secret gallery?

In all that regarded himself, as well as others, Nicholas de L'Epée gave ear with his usual light-hearted and light-headed recklessness and audacity. Not so the more enthusiastic and apprehensive Raymond. When the King seized upon the poniard,

“ Who then
Had stood beside Pelago, might have heard
The beating of his heart !”

Instantly, as Rufus and Flambard disappeared, De L'Epée felt his mantle violently twitched, and heard the agitated whisper, “ Let me hence, for our Lady's sake !”

In the next moment the solitariness of the Rabbi's chamber was unbroken, save by his own venerable presence. We leave him to his ruminations, and follow the steps of Raymond, who, upon his part followed those of his disguised Sovereign.

The Monarch was now alone, and within a foot's breadth of the portal of his castle, when a sudden grasp was laid upon his arm; he turned fiercely upon the intruder—

“Who art thou, in the devil's name?”

“The devil himself;” answered Raymond.

“I think thou art. Get thee to hell then! None knows better than *thou* that from *this bridge* there is a brief road thither, ha?”

“Give me a quittance-token first,” said the soi-disant demon, without wincing at this deadly allusion to the local “*facilis descensus Averni.*”

“Aye, marry!” replied the King, “shall it be *hemp or steel?*”

“STEEL!” answered the youth, promptly and firmly, “that dagger under thy vest—the misericorde thou hadst but even now from the hand of the rich Jew!”

William the Red fixed an eye of astonishment upon the youth.

“It is *mine!*” continued the latter, “and I had rather it were hilt-deep in my bosom than lost!”

“Pull thy cloak over thy visage,” said the King, “and follow me.”

The reader, however curious and impatient, must submit to a temporary exclusion from the chamber in which King William and our young friend held their tête-à-tête. In due time we will admit him to full confidence, but, in the interim, must entreat that his imagination take a transit over the next two hours, at the expiry of which we gladly play the page and usher him again into the royal presence. Just at this moment, be it observed, the Procurator-Fiscal enters at one door, while the gallant Sir Ilbert de Tunbridge makes his exit at another.

"Hath your Grace been hearing a *love-story*?" said Flambard, "that De Tunbridge goes hence with such a simpering visage?"

"Marry, a shrewd guess;" answered Rufus; "as, indeed, thou art rarely wide of the mark, good Ranulph, be it an angel of light or darkness that helps the archery of thy wit. But now, another shaft of conjecture, I pray you—who is the favoured dame?"

"The fair kinswoman of Hugh-le-Loup," replied the favourite; "*she*—for a thousand bezants! come they from Jodesac's when they will."

"No wager, I bless heaven!" answered the King. "But if this be sooth, what then?"

"Then," replied the Justiciary, "your Grace must needs expound to the good Earl that he hath cumbered himself needlessly with the wardship of the noble Damoiselle; and that, forsooth, the strayed chicken must under your royal wing; better late than never. Meanwhile, Sir Ilbert de Tunbridge is a blessed man of his oxgangs, let us hear what portion thereof he is willing to sacrifice to St. Cupid while he is thus hot-livered. Let him bethink him how best to transmew his superfluous knight's-fees into bright gold for your Grace's exchequer, ere Matilda de Aquila and her broad lands be his."

"Beard of St. Luke!" exclaimed the King, with a grim chuckle, "then must we look for war with the mighty kingdom of Chester!"

"Very like," said Ranulph, "to say nought of the dread empire of Northumberland."

"Now, by the soul of my great Father!" cried Rufus, "who made these overweening Barons the bloated things they are, I will work my pleasure with them both; and first, and

chiefly with De Mowbray—*his* day of grace draws fast to sun-set! Bethink thee, Ranulph, what course were best with the proud rebel."

"Your Grace," said Flambard, "hath heard one parable to-day, I pray you listen to a second. 'A certain man wist of a hidden treasure. Now, it was the night-season, and he said, When it is morning I will send oxen and mules and bring it thence. But, while it was yet dark, the Lord of that treasure, repenting him of its hiding-place, sent trusty and faithful servants to remove it; and behold, at morning tide it was gone !'"

"I understand thee, Ranulph; but it came to pass (since we must needs talk in this clerky vein,) that he who wist of the treasure, had also trusty and faithful servants; and they laid in wait for the treasure-bearers, and rent it from them with the strong hand, and returned to their Lord rejoicing."

"Oh, cry ye mercy," said the Justiciary, "I looked not for that spoke in the wheel. But your Grace's falconry is yet a flight beyond me,—I see not either the sport or wisdom of hawk-

ing at caged birds ; they should keep within wire for me, while my brave merlin flew at other game. Plainly, my Liege, why should the poor maiden quit her convent-pallet for this bootless night-journey ?”

“ Merciful-hearted child of the Devil !” said Rufus, “ I will enlighten thee. The treasure-bearer of *thy* parable is the ‘ Orphan ’ of Jodesac’s.—He hath in very deed, ‘ come for his inheritance’—but of that anon. Meanwhile, zeal for De Mowbray’s house hath eaten him up.—He would give his birth-right to have this baby-faced minion of his Lord north of the Humber ; and, for his own sake, being, as I well believe, a right gallant stripling, I have listed for once to play the gracious fool, and give him our royal assent to bear the damsel hence.”

“ Aye !” ejaculated Flambard.

“ Aye,” repeated the Monarch, “ but by St. Mary, clogged with a back-breaking proviso—to wit, *if his luck holds*, and he meet not by the way with those who shall thrust him out of saddle at lance-point, ere he have ridden two leagues of his journey.”

“ *Diablezot!* a passage of arms!” exclaimed the Minister, amused with the romance and chivalrous absurdity of the thing.

“ De Mowbray’s champion against all comers,” rejoined Rufus, “ but, by St. Luke’s face! I think there will be never a lance splintered in the matter. Our court gallants are a-weary of saddle and helmet—they like not the humour of again thrusting their dainty bodies into steel harness—nay, I have tried divers of them within this hour. Here was De Lacy, with his curled Lucifer-lip, and furnace-glaring eye; no slug-a-bed to look at; and yet, forsooth, *he* sorrowed to say, a ravelled matter of his own craved knitting up to-night, were all vows kept; and so much for the helping hand of De Lacy. Then came the newly risen-up Du Coci, our Castellan elect of the Tyne Castle—and *he*, by’r Lady, said me nay, after a worse fashion, for, ‘ under our royal favour,’ and ‘ craving our royal pardon,’ and so forth, he is bound rather to couch lance *against* than *for* us, in this matter of De Mowbray’s daughter. Last, came the daintily attired De Tunbridge, and he indeed hath pledged him to the work, but with the like

devotion that a man would finger a serpent withal."

"Now, as I am a Christian man, and a peaceful," said Flambard, "your Grace, at a pinch, is well-holpen of these bull-headed Barons! Marry, if there were land or gold for the winning, they would be up and doing, were it to cut the throats of their mothers; fast sleepers else, I warrant them! For Sir Ilbert de Tunbridge, he knows not which it were best to pleasure or offend—the King of the South, or the King of the North, (craving my Liege's pardon.) Howbeit, betwixt the Devil and the deep sea, he runs upon your Grace."

"He must run upon sharp steel," said Rufus, "and that with good heart and heed; or, by St. George, if De Mowbray's varlet bear him as I surmise, there will be a cry for leechcraft, and a bloody couch upon the forest turf."

"And a fair riddance of the fair Dame," said Flambard, "who might, had wisdom been listened to, have proved good hostage for the saving of blood-spilling and leechcraft a thousand fold! —O King!" continued the Justiciary, after a slight pause—"O King, live for ever! but grant me, I pray thee, a boon!"

"Give me a thousand merks," said the King, "that I may consider it graciously."

"Grammercy!" cried Flambard, "your gracious Grace hath been too often in the Jewry. A thousand merks! the matter of my boon were dear at a bezant's purchase. It is but, for once in a hundred years, to make the speaking of plain truth to a King *no treason*."

"Oh, villain!" exclaimed the Monarch, "not for France and Normandy, Anjou, Maine and Picardy, to the boot of this filthy England! plain truth? pah! there was never a King that could abide it! Let us to supper, Ranulph, where, if thou must needs poison me, do it with juice of toads and aspics, and not with *plain truth*."

"For the Lady Constance' sake," returned the Favourite, "I will pledge your Grace, as a most gallant, chivalrous, generous, and magnanimous——"

"—— Fool!" added the King, completing the sentence.

"*In veritate victoria!*"" cried Flambard, "who shall gainsay PLAIN TRUTH!?"——

And they betook them to the supper-chamber.

"Tush, man," said De Lacy, amused with the incident, "if need be, I will swear that thou art mine own especial Book-a-bosom. But what, and whither, with this black bundle of horse-flesh?"

"To rack and manger in the wild woods!" cried the stranger, and, throwing the rein over the steed's neck, he gave the foaming animal a stroke with his heavy riding rod, which sent it thundering along as before, through what is now called Colewort-street, in the direction of the East gate.

This metamorphosis, which has taken more time to describe than to act, was scarcely accomplished, before they whom it was intended to baffle, rode hastily up. They were three in number. Two clattered along without bandying look or word; but the third, aware that the fugitive might have made his way into the High Street, either by doubling the Cathedral walls, or through the narrow space betwixt Ealden and Newan Mynstres, drew bridle quickly, and questioned the Baron and his new comrade with more brevity than reverence.

"Ride on, tallow-face!" said De Lacy, "I

and this holy man came but a minute hence from the walls of blessed St. Grimbald. But, methinks, there are horse-hoofs clattering eastward even now."

The pursuer gave his courser the spur and vanished.

"Now, holy Pilgrim," continued Sir Reginald, "I have saved thee."

"Shall I give thanks?" said the Saxon, with laconic bitterness.

"Aye—doubtless—the thanks of the frozen adder."

"Not *words* at least—or they were the first that ever these lips gave to a Norman."

"The more accursed thou," answered De Lacy, "that know'st not better to receive good, were it from the hand of Satan himself."

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed the inscrutable one, hoarsely, "De Lacy preacheth! the tiger saith to the wolf, 'Avaunt, blood-licker!' Say rather, proud Norman, the more accursed they from whose hand cometh cause only for cursing!"

"I have snatched thee," said the Baron, "from the vengeance of a King, within whose very palace thou hast striven, with lies blacker

than hell, to destroy the life and fame of a Norman noble—dost thou curse me for *that*?"

"No—it were meting thee measure for measure somewhat too strictly—for though of all curses the gift of life is perhaps the bitterest, it was, I grant, of mine own begging. But thou hast forgotten me, mighty Lord!"

"Not I, by St. Francis," replied Sir Reginald. "Thou art he who dug a pit for Earl de Mowbray this blessed morning, and well nigh fell into it thyself."

"Add too," rejoined the Saxon, "that I am he who *dug a grave*, six winters agone, for thy fair-haired wife, Reginald de Lacy! She whom thy murderous poniard struck to the heart, as ye travelled northward to the princely towers that made part of her goodly dowry!"

"Liar and slave!" shouted the Baron, starting from the conscience-stricken stupor of a moment, and laying a fierce gripe upon the throat of his accuser.

"NORMAN!" exclaimed the latter, extricating himself with the remarkable strength we have before attributed to him, and then adding with concentrated bitterness—

"Thou canst not call me *that*! and I have no fouler brand even for *thee—thee* whom I am witness against that the blood of woman is upon thy hand! The hour was late and silent, but the death-scream came upon other ears than thine. The scene was lone and savage, but the murderer and his victim were not *alone*.—I saw, from my rocky screen; and toiled in the black midnight to heap dust and clay upon the lovely limbs thy cruelty left gory and coffinless!"

Hardened as was the heart of the fierce Norman, he could not listen to these dreadful words without a momentary shudder; and the hand, which had been clutching at his dagger-hilt, was slowly withdrawn to pass twice or thrice over a brow more furrowed and pallid than its wont. Thus smoothed for him, the brazen devil returned to his throne, although a little discomfited.

"Old man, it was well done to bury the dead; but thou wert deceived—thy dim eyes served thee not aright—this hand——"

He stretched it forth as if to accompany, with a befitting gesture, an asseveration of his innocence. The disclaiming accents

"Held struggle with his throat, but came not forth;"

and the effort terminated in a laugh that sounded horribly epileptic.

“ Ha ! ha ! ha ! *wife*, saidst thou ? A wiser man I, by St. Grimbald ! I promise thee I traffic not in such gear, save *par-amours*.”

“ Then,” exclaimed the Saxon, with such a smile as might extend the lank jaws of a skeleton, “ who digs the blackest pit-fall for De Mowbray, if thou wouldst traffic thus with his fair-browed daughter ?”

“ Ha ! sayst thou ?”

“ She that goes hence at midnight—alas, poor lamb ! not to the shepherd’s fold, but the wolf’s den.”

“ Saxon wizard ! dost thou speak of Constance de Mowbray ?”

“ Didst thou not hear ?”

“ Aye, by St. Francis ! follow !”

They strode into the deeper gloom of the Convent shadows.

“ Art thou man or fiend ?” said the Baron. “ that canst thus read the heart of another, as a priest reads his missal ?”

“ No matter ; I have read thine, and can help thee to fulfil its purpose—*can* and *will*—have

thou remembrance of it when the cause of the groaning Saxon cries again to thee for mercy or for vengeance. Swear it, De Lacy!"

"By Heaven and Hell! that is—if thou canst make thy helping hand worth the swearing for."

"I can. It shall open to thee the gates of a safer and more secret hold for thy stolen treasure of to-night, than the dark towers of Newark, massy and moated as they be. Whither *I* lead thee, Reginald de Lacy, the Northern tyrant shall not track thy steps—no, nor the tyrant's tyrant, the fierce King."

"Now, by bread and salt! thou art a strange Saxon! but look!" added the Baron in a lower tone, and pointing to a dark angle of one of the buttresses, "seest thou aught *there*?"

"I see nought," replied his companion, "except the grey walls and the shadows of coming night."

"I see more," rejoined the Norman; "look! it moves—it rises—Mary-Mother! what thing is this?"

The wicked, like the demons they obey, carry their own Hell within and around them. De Lacy, the bold and the bad—the libertine and

the murderer—had the superstitious weakness of a child ; and drawing back from the object of his alarm, instead of advancing to ascertain its nature, he said, “Old man ! canst thou call fiends from the abyss ?”

“ I can,” answered the composed Saxon, “ and so canst thou ; but they would not come, called we never so loud and long. Why should they ? Man is *their* slave, and they are no slaves to man.”

“ Why—see ! look ! behold !” exclaimed De Lacy, as a low, dark, shapeless object emerged into the clearer twilight, with something of the pace and motion, but nothing of the aspect or stature, of a human thing. It glided slowly and inaudibly around the foot of the buttress, passed a second and a third in the like stealthy manner, and then started into sudden flight with a swiftness that, for so diminutive a creature, seemed little less than miraculous. It broke the spell, however, that hung upon the Baron, “ Fiend or fury !” he vociferated, “ I will see of what stuff thou art fashioned !”

And instantly he sprang into pursuit, with all the speed his active, though somewhat bulky

frame, was capable of. The pursued fled towards Nunna Mynstre, and the keen eye of the pursuer tracked it within the shadow of that monastery ; but *there*, although his foot pressed the spot where it ceased to be visible almost in an instant, it seemed as if the solid earth, or the thick walls, had opened and devoured it ! there was nothing for either ear or eye to discern ; and after a fruitless search, and thrusting with his sword point, unavailingly, into every niche and corner, the surprised Baron returned upon his steps to the place from whence he had set out.

He found himself alone ; for, almost equally inscrutable, the Saxon had disappeared during his brief absence.

Sir Reginald drew a long breath—looked around him for a moment—withdrew the bonnet from his heated brow, and then broke out as he replaced it—

“ Gog’s bones ! I think there is holiday in hell to-night, and the fiends are minded to palter with none but Reginald de Lacy for their infernal mirth ! Am I awake ? ”

He shook himself, as a war-horse tosses its

mane—fixed his keen eye upon a light which began to twinkle in a window of Nunna Mynstre—then upon a single bright and beautiful star, the first that triumphed over the dying twilight—and suddenly strode away, as if he read in their contrasted beams that which reminded him of work to be done speedily—of what nature we shall see.

CHAPTER X.

Duke. Has not Jupiter thrown away his rays and his thunder to walk amongst mortals? Does not Apollo suffer himself to be deprived of his quiver, that he may sometimes sing to his harp?

Leonardo. Nay, marry, I have heard of a Nobleman that has been drunk with a pedlar, and of a magnifico that has played at blow-point.

The Antiquary, a Comedy, by S. Marmion.

It was a night of surpassing beauty, in which the hour drew near for the departure of a being as beautiful from the convent of Nunna Mynstre. The bells of the three great monasteries, and of many an inferior edifice, had chimed midnight—lauds were sung—the streets were silent and abandoned, and upon every side the far-extending city lay like a sleeping giant, hushed in the tranquillity of that solemn hour, and steeped in the flood of silver splendour which the summer's moon poured down in her perfect fulness from a sky without one speck of cloud or vapour.

of this approaching “Passage of arms,” as Flambard called it, with as much precision as a Marshal of the lists in open tourney. Three champions only, with what weapons they listed, were to make good ‘against all comers’ the departure of Constance ; the said comers not to oppose with unknighthly odds, but man to man and horse to horse, in whatever protracted succession. Minor conditions and observances we will not be tedious enough to specify.

It wanted little to the appointed moment of *tryst* at Nunna Mynstre when He of the Heart of Steel drew towards the convent-portal.

“Get thee under cloud, Madam with the silver visage !” he muttered, as the prolonged shadow of his own tall frame shot before him upon emerging from that of the Cathedral. Suddenly his eye fell upon the same low, dark, singular object which, on the same spot, had led De Lacy the strange dance described in our last chapter. It stood at no great distance, perfectly motionless, and without the least resemblance to any thing human or breathing. A dark cloak thrown over a low pillar might have been its prototype ; and it was not until Raymond shortened the

space between them by a few strides, that the shapeless shape gave symptoms of locomotion. In an instant two long arms were flung abroad, and a cry, preternaturally shrill, echoed along the convent-walls. Then might it be seen that legs as well as arms were at command, for, with the same wonderful speed as before, the swart enigma shot away into the shadow of Ealden Mynstre—but not, however, with the same success ; for the light-heeled Raymond was of other racing mettle than the stately Lord of Newark, and speedily succeeded in laying clutch upon the fugitive. A single glance served to show whom and what he had captured, being none other than our diminutive acquaintance, Elfin Puekfist ; and sharp and shrill was the repeated cry of the poor abortion, as Raymond plucked the cloak from his abridged body, and gave its stunted disproportions to the moonbeam.

“ Peace, thou villainous mandrake ! peace !” exclaimed the eaptor, “ and tell me who hath planted thy shapeless carcass here, like an imp of Satan upon the watch ! Nay, thou shalt find a tongue to speak as well as to scream, I warrant thee !”

The Dwarf pointed with his long shrivelled fingers over Raymond's shoulder, and the latter, on turning, beheld the Minstrel at his side.

"Seize no waif, fair Sir," said the Melodist, "upon a manor that does not call thee lord."

"By our Lady of Nunna Mynstre," replied the youth, "I will seize to-night all waifs that stray within my clutch, were they from the manor of Beelzebub!"

Then, with a single hand and little effort, lifting the "wee man," like a monkey or a puppet, to the projecting ledge of a buttress-moulding, and holding him upon its narrow seat with a grasp by the tunic collar, he added—

"Now, gentle Minstrel, I hold this heavenly-visaged vassal of thine to a light ransom—ten words of truth."

"Oh! Jew that thou art!" replied the Minstrel, "where should one of *my* craft come by such a treasure? make it a hundred *lies*, and we will bargain without a higgle."

"No! *truth*," exclaimed the Squire, "I will not bate thee a fraction of simple truth!"

"I pray you, Sir Squire, set down my heavenly-visaged vassal, as ye have termed him,

upon his mother earth.—He is yet but a babe and suckling, and thou, I take it, art fitting neither for wet nurse nor dry."

"I will make his joints crack with my caresses," returned Raymond, "if thou dost not answer quickly and truly, to what end, deep midnight as it is, thou wert even now harping and *vir-i-lai-ing* beneath these walls?"

"Why, thou sharp-eared and long-tongued catechist," replied the Bard, "I am a Welshman, and the Lady Abbess is my hundredth cousin,—will that content thee?"

"No, by Cadwallader and his goats!" said the youth, "and take heed, chapman of Satan's wares! for thy false coin passes not with me!"

"Marry, then," returned the Minstrel, "the red-nosed Porter is my especial gossip, and I twangled my gittern for the love of his pasty and pottle-pot."

"Thou art gamesome, O man of melody," rejoined the Squire, "but it helps thee not in this pinch. Strike other chords! or by St. Dunstan, thy mooncalf here is but a cast-away!" and therewithal a closer gripe of the

throttle made the poor Dwarf groan and grimace with ten-fold hideousness.

“ Hold !” exclaimed the sympathising master of Puckfist, “ Truth is like love and murder—it will out—mark then—I wot of a fair Dame within these holy walls”

“ Ha !” interrupted Raymond—

“ —That must to horse and away, ere the first lark sing,” continued the Minstrel, “ and I had a secret song for her secret ear.”

“ The fiend thou hadst ! then, gentle Songster, know that in my secret soul I have a warrant to drag from thee the burden of that song, though it were hidden in thy very heart’s core !”

“ Spin no cordage for it,” was the reply, “ I did but crave of the fair traveller to let me ride hence in her train to-night. But thou, gentle Squire, that hast such ample warrant in her matters, mayst grant me the boon in the noble Damoiselle’s name, and there an end.”

“ Aye marry ! thou art modest ! but it may not be, friend Twang-the-gittern.”

“ Simply, O Squire of Dames, wherefore ?”

“ Simply, O Prince of Jig-makers, because thou art a coward.”

"Why, I can whip and spur with the best," said the Minstrel, "and the better for being a coward. If thou wouldest make sure of the lady (and I promise ye there are evil stars twinkling to-night!) let me ride at her bridle-rein—her palfrey shall speed with wings rather than hoofs. I grant ye, I am a coward! thou hast well said it; and therefore it behoves me the more to keep where valour is stirring; and as I dare not strike stroke myself, to travel only with such as can strike for me, when need is. Upon this, therefore, burn moon-light no longer! I will ride hence with thee, will ye, nill ye, and that I swear on the word of a true coward! shine out, fair moon! my oath is sworn, my steed is bitted, and I would to St. Julian we were forth of Winchester!"

Amused, and not without suspicion of something more than lay upon the surface, Raymond could frame no answer to the pertinacious applicant for companionship, before a new arrival broke further conference, and almost instantly changed both subject and scene.

The new comer was a mounted cavalier, mailed from head to foot; the reins of a powerful

charger in his left grasp, and a lance erect in the right. A mace and battle-axe balanced each other at the saddle bow.

"Noble De Aldery!" said Raymond, in under tones.—

"Peace, and to horse!" was the reply, in the deep melancholy accents of De Waleric's kinsman; and he whispered in the ear of the Squire that which sent him with a hurried step to strike the signal stroke of departure upon the convent gate. Loud was the knock, and hasty was the summons, and hastily was it obeyed; the Lady Constance appearing like a spirit of the moonlight, mantled over with its "beauty-making-beautiful" effulgence. Her protectors bowed their armed heads as she issued from the portal and gracefully was the reverence returned. She bent yet lowlier for the parting benediction of the Abbess, and then rose to the saddle of a courser supplied by the treacherous Abbot of Newan Mynstre, for a flight which he well trusted would never be accomplished. Raymond assisted the lovely rider with a trembling hand, for he felt the rapid beating of a heart that pillow'd its trust in him and Heaven.—It

seemed, by this, as if enchantment had peopled the approach to Nunna Mynstre, with such a simultaneous promptitude did the various agents collect upon it. Torfin Paganel, mounted, and lance in hand—the little troop of archers headed by the fiery-visaged Hildebrand ; and, last and least, the re-appearing Elfin Puckfist, leading from Heaven knows what strange stall, but ready trapped and bitted, a charger whose blood and bone might have honoured the horsemanship of a King. His master vaulted into the war-saddle with little of the awkwardness of a civilian ; and suddenly, in a style savouring even less of the pacific, brandished a goodly lance over his head ; saying, at the same time,

“ By the black stave and the bright head of Tintadgel, I should have made a proper man-at-arms, if it had not pleased Heaven to make me a coward !”

“ Silence, thou quavering buffoon !” said Raymond, who, however, no longer disputed the social point with his lyric acquaintance. The whole party then set off at a round pace, passed unchallenged through the north-gate, and soon left considerably in their rear the glimmering towers of the “ White City.”

CHAPTER XI.

“ The royal Leopard
Chases thy milk-white dedicated hind—
Will Cassimer cross the hunt, or join the huntmen ? ”
Coleridge’s “ Zephyr.”

A VAST forest received the travellers, and “ now in glimmer, and now in gloom,” they rode along its magnificent glades. The light, however, bore little proportion to the shadow, so dense was the canopy of foliage above — so broken and infrequent the beam that struggled to the turf-en alleys below. It is unnecessary, we presume, to caution the southern reader in the words of the Northern Minstrel—

“ Seek not the scene—the axe—the plough—
The boor’s dull fence have marr’d it now.”

It seemed strange to Raymond that, in so brief a period, he should find himself socially accompanied by the nearest kinsman of De Walleric; in whose presence he had himself so re-

cently been stigmatized as the assassin of that unfortunate. We do not hold it essential to explain tediously by what caprice of choice or chance William de Aldery, of all men, had become his fellow-champion ; but so it was, and not even the presence of Constance, in all her beauty and confiding helplessness, could wholly repress a feeling of pain in such companionship. On either part this feeling at length struggled into utterance, and the melancholy topic was adverted to, darkly and brokenly.

“ It shall be blood for blood ! ” said Raymond, “ upon *my* spirit *that* is already branded. But, alas ! Earth that drank the gore, and Heaven that saw it shed, are alike silent ! ”

“ Be the silent Heavens, in their own terrible day, their own avengers ! ” said the Knight, “ I will be mine on earth, if man, or fiend, or angel, will shew me upon *whom*. I tell thee, youth, could I have deemed thee guilty, in yonder Tyrant’s castle, I would have stabbed thee at his very foot.”

“ A deed for the laughter of hell ! ” said Raymond ; “ Upon that counter-trail of vengeance, De Aldery, thou hadst hunted thine own soul

to death, and pierced a heart that loved De Waleric as dearly as ever did thine own. A day comes when I will prove to thee——but hark ! ”

And he drew bridle, as his quickened ear caught the beating of hoofs from an adjacent glade.

“ They come,” he muttered—then giving his steed the rowel, added, aloud, “ Set on ! and be it at their peril that seek to stay or turn us ! ”

They spurred accordingly ; and, by the joining of the two glades in a slip of moonlight, were placed speedily abreast of the new comers ; that is to say, of Sir Alberic du Coci, and the facetious Nicholas De L’Epée. The former merely uttered a brief exclamation of greeting, and, with a wave of his gauntleted hand, rode briskly ahead.

“ Whither away, Sir Knight, so fair and fast ? ” said Raymond.

“ To supper I,” answered Du Coci, “ with our Lady’s blessing and St. Julian’s ! ”

“ And the green earth for a trencher,” added Nicholas, “ and the bat and the owl for feast-mates ! Heaven mend the banquet ! ”

"Amen!" continued Du Coci; "but there is a feast toward in this forest, to which, if grace had not melted from the earth, like the last year's snow, *I* had been the first bidden guest. It recks not! there are those in the next glade, haughty and high-stomached, that will take some carving for, I promise ye! cater well for them, gentle Squire!"

"We will endeavour," returned Cœur d'Acier, "meanwhile, fair thanks for thy warning! and moreover, gentle Knight, I swear to thee, that in this matter of forest-feasting, I am no lord of the banquet."

Sir Alberic made no reply, except the single word, "farewell!" which was echoed by Nicholas, as they spurred their coursers, and vanished in the woodland shadows.

"Is this a jest, a warning, or a threat?" said Constance. "What means it, Raymond?"

"It means, noble Lady," replied her champion, "that beyond this glade we travel not without resistance. Our pathway is beset. Hark! and behold!"

A bugle-note, at a little distance, rang sharply through the woods; and, in the broad

open glade terminating the shadowy vista they now traversed, they saw the flitting shapes of mounted champions, their burnished arms and equipments glittering in the moonbeam.

“Here be those,” resumed Cœur d’Acier, “who will neither pass, nor let pass, without blow and thrust; now, if it be *their* heat that we vail pennon and draw rein, and ride back like beaten slaves to Winchester, what answer make we?”

“Upon them with levelled lance, say I, were they a hundred!” exclaimed De Aldery.

“And I,” said Raymond, “were they a thousand!”

“*Three* were a better number,” said Torfin, coldly, “for I see not yet that our own battle makes heavier muster; unless this jolly Minstrel can couch a lance as well as jingle a harp.”

“Nay, by St. Francis,” cried the Bard, checking his steed, “not I! commend me to the care of the lady, and the lady to her saint. I carry steel, as a hedge-priest carries a missal, all for show, and nothing for use. A man of peace am I. But give me the Damoiselle’s rein, and while ye that are shedders of blood, tear at

each other's entrails, I will engage to snatch her from this pit-fall without stroke of sword."

He caught her bridle as he spoke, bent over her palfrey's neck, and whispered a few words in her ear.

"Eternal Heavens!" she exclaimed, with a vehemence that might have excited astonishment, had there been leisure for the feeling; adding, with like energy, as she spurred towards her chief protector, "abandon me not, Raymond! in thee—in thee alone is my trust! To thy hand—to thy spirit and faith, did my Father consign a charge which, by thy every hope here and hereafter! I conjure thee delegate not to another, although a princely coronet sat upon his helm!"

Little guessing her cause for apprehension, Raymond could almost have smiled at its apparent wildness and simplicity; the Minstrel being, perhaps, the last man to whom, in such a juncture, he would have abandoned his charge. He strove however, in vain, to re-assure her.

"This prevention," she said, "thou hast foreseen. Tell me, then, who bars our course? If it be He, whose name, even in these wilds I fear to breathe to the winds of Heaven, lest the very

• sounds call up a fiend—if it be He, I tell thee Raymond, the hand that strikes him dead, ere but a finger of his be stretched towards this loathing frame, *that* hand shall be blood-guiltless in the sight of Heaven! Upon him, Raymond! in the holiest name! the burden of a thousand crimes shall crush his charger, and fling the tyrant headlong to thy foot, a vanquished recreant!"

• The object of her alarm, one of the opposers, who had advanced a little upon their path, as if to be assured of their approach, fell back almost instantly upon his station. But a glance had convinced Cœur d'Acier that it was not De Lacy. It was obvious to him, indeed, that the mind of Constance had acquired a diseased susceptibility of terror and aversion for the Baron of Newark. His very name knocked at her heart. His mere image had become a spectral thing, "to haunt, to startle, and way-lay."

Her young protector, however, knew that, in the present instance, other adversaries awaited them.

"This," he said, "is no shaft from De Lacy's quiver. He knows not that the foot of Constance de Mowbray treads British earth; and

why should the flushed reveller desert the banquet and the galliard in festal Winchester to seek adventure by wood and wold ? Now, by my life, not he ! ”

“ Thou art deceived,” replied the Lady, “ even but now a fearful voice knelled it in my ear.”

“ A voice ! ” repeated Raymond with surprise, “ what voice ? ” .

“ No matter,” she answered wildly, “ my every vein and nerve yet thrill with the warning—I tell thee, Raymond, he hath ridden upon our track, and is at hand.”

By this time they were within lance-length of the open glade.

“ Halt, gentle friends,” cried the Squire aloud; “ take we breath and counsel ; and let us array our battle. Who, for the honour of ladye-love and knightly fame, will run a course with me in the bright moonbeam against three champions ? ”

“ That will I ! ” responded De Aldery.

“ And I,” said Torfin Paganel, “ albeit they are *thrice three*, good Raymond, if I have eyes to see and count.”

“ Then—” exclaimed Constance, like one starting from a trance, “ upon your lives, ha-

zard it not ; the charge against such odds were madness and not courage.—Plunge into the forest depths—the paths we have journeyed are at least yet open for our return, and, if it must be so, back once again to Winchester !—”

“ Back then, gentle Bride of De Lacy ! ” said a low and disguised voice—

“ Prophet of evil ! No ! ” she resumed, “ I defy thee and thine augury ! at the King’s foot will I take sanctuary, and at his hand sue for protection from his ruffian-lieges. Back then, I say, to Winchester ! ”

“ On, then, say I, to York ! ” vociferated Raymond, “ heed not the Lady, gallant hearts ! save to make good her onward path ! ”

“ Raymond ! madman ! hear me, I entreat ! I command ! ”

“ Deaf as a tempest I ! ” replied the youth, “ to all but *one* word—*forward* ! ”

He loosened his sword in the scabbard—woke the mettle of his courser with hand and heel—grasped his lance, and then cried aloud—

“ I go ! follow or fly who will—now, by our Lady and St. George, the curse of the withered hand and the palsied heart be upon him that shuns or shrinks ! ”

"Measureless phrenzy!" said Constance, grasping his arm, "upon whose head shall be the blood that flows?"

"Mine, in the name of Him who avenges! set on, brave lances! away Lady! why, where is the spirit that even now cried 'sweep him from my path?'"

"Gone," she replied, "gone with the selfish terror that awoke it. I have rooted the trembler from my soul—I have called up the De Mowbray within me, and, by the honour of my father's house, *his* vassals shall hear and shall obey me!"

"*Hereafter*, noble and lovely one! to the last of their blood and breath! but not to-night;—at least not *now* nor *thus*—Set on! and look, gentle friends, if it be *my* lot to go down, heed not—reck not—tarry not for that! stunned to the brain, or stricken to the heart, I shall be cared for; or at the worst, sleep well upon the woodland turf.—There let me lie, and be the winds of heaven my requiem! but ye that keep saddle and stirrup, away with the Lady through the gap in your broken foes! Spare not man or courser in the race; draw not breath or bridle

for thirst or faintness, until the battlements of York be around ye!—Gallant De Aldery, this do I implore of *thee*! Torfin Paganel! Stout Hildebrand! Men of De Mowbray's banner and household! have heed to it upon your lives! By my eternal soul! there is no grave so deep that it shall keep me from the midnight couch of him who plays the traitor or the coward in this pinch!"

"To the foul fiend with thy threats!" exclaimed Torfin, "whose lance will be stronger or sharper for terror of thy ghost, think'st thou?"

"Oh, Mary-mother!" cried the Minstrel, "What tedious fools are these brave men to a true coward? why, for all this flourish and fanfaranade, never a man of ye yet knows whether the hindrance of a pin point be intended towards him."

"Prove we that, Sir Crowder!" replied the Squire, bursting out of the narrow glade, with a cry of "*a moi, mes hommes d'armes!*"

"And to the fray he rode amain,
Followed by all the archer train!"

CHAPTER XII.

“ Now, gallants ! for your lady’s sake,
Upon them with the lance !”

The Lady of the Lake.

ONCE in the open *clearing* (to use a trans-atlantic phrase,) and under the broad eye of the moon, their situation was palpable. Retiring some hundred paces on every hand, as if the charming rod of a magician had swept the circle, the vast woods reared a magnificent wall of verdure, like a natural rampart, entirely around the arena of contest, which, both in its extent and smooth level surface, seemed fitting theatre for knightly achievement.

Two outlets were visible in the “bosky bournes,” dark, narrow glades, devaricating, one right, one left ; but before the mouth of each there was a mounted warrior, cased in steel to the teeth, and armed with lance, mace, and

battle-axe. Betwixt these, a third occupied the half-way station, with the like fulness of equipment, offensive and defensive: while, on either side, other, but less chivalrous looking personages, reined in their impatient coursers; more, however, with the air of spectators than of actors in the approaching drama.

The champion of the left-hand outlet sat like a tower of steel upon his mountainous black charger; grim and ponderous as heart of man could desire. He upon the right had less of the son of Anak in his proportions, but was obviously no petty antagonist: while the middle rider appeared tall, more elegantly spare and trim, and glittering in "fancifully conceited mail," as Master Osric would express it.

Raymond spurred in advance.

"Stand, ho! who comes?" exclaimed a voice of thunder.

"Travellers in haste," was the reply, "who be ye that give the challenge?"

"Give up thy charge, Sir Varlet, and we will certify thee touching the whom and the why, at leisure."

"Not to thy lord and master, good clerk of

St. Nicholas, although he come hither and roar for it ! Ride on, therefore, if it so please you, or ride apart, one or t'other ; and give passing space for the King's lieges."

" Beardless braggart !" growled the Opposer, " Ride *thou* to the gates of Hell, an' ye list, but the gentle Damoiselle yonder tarries with us."

" Doth she so ?" said Raymond, lowering his lance,—“ make way ! or by St. Mary, he that refuses shall bide a buffet ! What ! are not these the free wilds of merry England ? wherefore keep ye watch and ward in the woodlands as at the barriers of a fenced city ?"

" Because," answered the bulky warrior, grimly relaxing to a sort of pleasantry, " we be woodland knights of King Oberon, and these glades be the barriers of his leaguer. Give up the Dame therefore, thou prating fool, for we will have toll of thee ere thou hast leave to pass !"

" Take it, in the Devil's name !" said Raymond, and, wheeling his charger round, he rode to the opposite extremity of the esplanade, to take ground for the career ; a sufficient hint to his colleagues, who were instantly abreast of their young leader, with brazed shields and

levelled lances ; the Minstrel and his Dwarf remaining by the side of Constance ; and Hildebrand and his troop surrounding them.

"The bulky warrior," cried Raymond, "for me !"

"Not for thy life !" said De Aldery, "It is the black giant, Montgomery,—horse and man would be as a mountain flung upon thee. Think not of it—mine is the stronger lance—the heavier steed. He in the centre—De Tunbridge as I think—*he* is your fairer mark !"

"We will run our course even as we are ranged," said the Squire ; "to waver now were to be laughed to scorn ! Who knows the right hand champion ?"

"Not I," replied the Knight, "but even *he* is heavier metal than De Tunbridge ; and, look, his lance is in the rest !"

"Upon him then !" said Raymond, "and St. George to speed ! *I* am for Montgomery ; now, Marshal of England, look to thy grim self !"

"Hobson's choice, methinks, for me !" cried Torfin, "how if I be dainty, and will none on't ?"

"Stir not," said Cœur d'Acier, "if the middle rider keep his station. If *he* too charge

us, forward ! and hurl him to the turf, if thou hast grace to do it. Yet, gentle friends, bethink ye ; we seek but to bear hence our charge; slay not outright if it may be helped. For thee, Hildebrand, and thy merry-men, upon your lives, shoot not a shaft ! Grasp thou the Lady's rein ; and if the champion of either glade go down, away, like stags to covert ! We that live and thrive will follow as we may."

At this instant loud and shrill rang the bugle of the Opposers. Raymond gave the word—

" God and De Mowbray !"

And almost before the sounds had died upon his lip, the four champions (Paganel and De Tunbridge stirring not from their ground) came together in midmost of the space with a shock that went like the reverberation of a thunder peal through the woods. How fared it with the parties ?

Down went William de Aldery, horse and man, before the stunning dint of his opponent ; and down, too, for all his bulk and brawn, and bones of adamant, and thews of iron, down went Hugo de Montgomery, his vast body coming to the earth like the armed giant, Galaspes, who,

when thrust through by King Arthur, crushed six Saracens to powder in his fall.

On either side a loud shout hailed the divided triumph. Every lance had been shivered in the charge, and the victors, with frayed mail, and dinted shields, but keeping their saddles as if they grew in them, recovered their plunging chargers, so as almost at the same instant to enable each to point his heavy sword at the gorget of the vanquished. The latter, although, as it chanced, with limbs neither bleeding nor broken, lay stunned and stupified upon the turf. Acknowledgment of defeat was therefore demanded in vain, on either part; De Aldery's shaken lungs not yet having gasped into play, and Montgomery lying absolutely speechless with rage and mortification to be thus foiled by a stripling.

“ What ho ! ” cried the successful champion of the opposers. “ Hither, Sir Leech ! and look well to the fallen—to both, I say—and do thou, Sir Squire of Dames, look to thyself ! We shall see anon, if thy luck holds.”

Thus saying, he wheeled his charger round—rode to his former station, received a fresh lance,

and made signal to De Tunbridge to be ready, this time, for *his* share in the rough game.

Cœur d'Acier, with blood and spirits now fully up, and seeing that De Aldery was already in helping hands,* promptly followed the example. He did but wave his hand in token of assurance to Constance, and then, with a second spear in the rest, cried aloud upon Paganel to second him in the career; the station of that worthy being over against De Tunbridge, and that of Raymond against the conqueror of De Aldery.

Again the signal-bugle of the adversaries rung out, and again the forest arches thrilled with the shock of mailed champion, and barbed charger! not, however, with any contribution thereto on the part of Torfin Paganel, who, with great dexterity, and a loving care of his own person, swerved in mid-flight, as Sir Ilbert came

* That our chivalrous young friend in the text may not appear deficient in one of the first attributes of knightly excellence—courtesy, we beg to cite in his justification, an authority that every one will be delighted to revert to. “He appeared to be much hurt with his fall, but that was a thing of such common occurrence in those days that no further notice was ever taken than by giving the injured person all the assistance that could be administered at the time.”—*Darnley*.

thundering on—gave his courtly adversary the slip, without touch of steel, and dashing through the left-hand opening in the greenwood, (thus momentarily left defenceless,) vanished instantly in the gloom.

Far other were the lot and bearing of his gallant comrade, who bore him like a pillar of adamant against the thunder-burst of his opponent's charge. Both lances flew, as before, to splinters, the one crashing upon Raymond's shield—the other upon the high conical helm of his adversary, and bearing him backwards upon the saddle, until every eye expected to see him hurled powerless upon the turf; both steeds, at the same time, flung upon their sinewy haunches, threatened to topple over and bury their struggling riders. Horse and man, however, had been better tutored; in a few seconds reins were shortened, and swords were out, and such tremendous blows given and taken as would have cheered the lion heart of the first Richard, or done honour to the gallant King himself, if then alive. The Lady's champion, indeed, was but as a boy compared to his stalwart enemy; but little of boy's play was there in the whirl and sweep of his heavy brand,

which, like the *Caliburn* of Arthur, seemed fitted to cleave an adversary fairly in two. He, however, upon whom the jeopardy lowered, was not to be thus tickled with impunity, and the result was in even balance, when the glance of a moment showed De Mowbray's Squire that Sir Ilbert de Tunbridge was like to be upon him with levelled spear, which would, no doubt, put a deadly stop to his broadsword playing. Collecting strength and energies, therefore, for one mighty effort, he discharged a blow so tremendously cogent, that, although the Knight partially broke its fury, blood was not only drawn through the cleft mail of the rider, but even the horse's head tasted its energy in spite of the thick *chanfron* that protected it. Back reared Bucephalus with the sudden smart, and, wheeling in momentary panic, afforded Raymond no ungraceful opportunity to retire also, and take station once more at the extremity of the ground for renewed career with lance. Unhappily, however, that formidable species of weapon seemed by this time to have become extinct. The splintering of more than two had not been calculated upon, and both were now in fragments. It remained only as a *pis-*

aller, therefore, to appropriate that which the Minstrel had so absurdly burdened himself with ; but even that resource was denied.

“ He that can *find* may *have*,” said the man of song ; “ I dropt me the useless lumber in the coppice.” Cœur d’Acier struck with clenched hand upon his forehead, then, with extended arm, as if in token of truce, dashed in front of the opposers, and, in a voice hoarse with excitement, demanded “ who amongst them, for the love of God and his Lady, would purvey him a fresh lance ?”

Extravagant as this appears, it was actually successful. There was a laugh—a shout—then a voice of command from him who seemed to be the leader, and, finally, the required weapon came whirling, javelin wise, through the air. The youth caught it, as a shepherd catches a hazel-twigs, and in less time than we take to narrate it, sat once more prepared for “ *joute à l'outrance*, as the combat with sharp steel was then termed.*

But the odds were now desperate. Not only

* In contra distinction to “ *joute à plaisir*, the tilt for pastime, or exercise, with blunt lances.

De Tunbridge rode stoutly abreast of the leader, but the vast bulk of the Marshal appeared rearing its heavy panoply again, and laying a spear like a weaver's beam in the *rest*, to avenge his former mischance ; while, on the other hand, De Aldery was yet *hors de combat* with his fall, and his charger gasping upon the earth with both fore-knees broken.

"Deal Knightly with me!" exclaimed the abandoned Champion, "I am alone against ye three!"

"Why, get thee hence, in the name of Satan!" cried the Leader, "and go scatheless, for, by St. Luke's face, thou hast this night borne thee right gallantly! Nevertheless, Fortune and thou are at odds, good youth, and the fair Dame is ours."

"Credit me, Sir Knight, it is not yet so!" returned the Squire; "not while I have blood and bone to grasp steel in her defence. But, in knightly honour, and for very shame, crush me not beneath three chargers at once!"

"One shall suffice," growled the revengeful Marshal; adding, to his colleagues, "Rein back, I pray you, and be this course *mine*. I will teach

Don Beardless and Brainless a black lesson in lance-craft!"

"Give up the Damsel!" cried the former speaker, "or commend thee to the Lord! for, by the rood of Tosti, if this course be run, thou art like to sup with St. Peter, if not St. Nicholas! thou wilt not? ha? why—so. If thou canst again unhorse this delicate Champion, I swear to thee, good boy, thou and thine, man, woman and steed, shall away without further hindrance. If not, and thou art still malapert, by Mary-mother we will set upon thee with what odds we may, and make an end of thy bull-headed resistance."

"I thank thee, mighty Sir," said Raymond, turning his charger—and the seemingly ill-paired Champions were set once more in deadly opposition. There was a moment's breathless silence and suspense. The eyes of both flashed visibly through the openings in the mailed hood, and their levelled spears glittered bright but motionless in the moon-beam. Then pealed the signal, and dashed the rowels, and thundered the noble steeds; and the combatants met in midmost of the arena with a concussion that

shook both earth and air. Every eye watched for the empty saddle and lifeless frame of the youth—but no! tremendous as was the career of Montgomery, and though his lance made way through plate and mail—through shield and hauberk, and blood spurted from the rents, the hardy and indomitable Raymond kept saddle and stirrup, and actually carried away upon his unbroken lance the loosened casque of his enemy.

It seemed little short of miraculous when, after such a career, man and horse on both sides were alike enabled to resume their opposing stations; the former, erect, fiery, and tameless as ever—the latter, rearing, tossing, and snorting with excitement.

Hitherto, or at least during the two first courses, the Lady Constance had been no spectator of the struggle. The whole band, eager to look upon the combatants, crowded in front of the narrow glade. And even Hildebrand, whose grasp, according to orders, was upon the rein of her palfrey, scrupled not to keep his long body betwixt his Lady and the field. Gradually, however, as their interest deepened, one, and

then another, and another, emerged into the arena ; and at last she beheld without obstruction the gallantry of her defender, and the fearful odds against which he dared to resist. Her cheek and lip were now crimson and now snow. Her eye now flashed and dilated, now closed against the terrors of the scene, and throbbed hotly under the imprisoning lids. But, in the last emergency, when the three adverse champions closed abreast, with spears levelled against *one* bosom, and *that* bosom the only one that beat in kindness and fidelity towards her ; “love mastered fear,”—a generous indignation burned through her whole frame and spirit. She cried aloud upon Hildebrand to release her rein ; and had the worthy equerry been either a jot less stubborn, or more susceptible, the prize of that night’s “gentle and free passage-at-arms” would have been instantly self-adjudged to the stronger party, without the shivering of another lance. But cold was the heart, and deaf the ear, and strong the gripe of Hildebrand ; and only such cold comfort issued from his leathern lips as—

“Rest ye content, Lady ; Lord’s hests must be obeyed, if even a Jack-an-ape give them ;” and

he kept his hold with the tenacity of a smith's vice.

"God of Heaven and Earth!" exclaimed Constance, "are these thy creatures, or very stones and blocks?—White-livered dastards! will ye behold him perish, and neither shoot shaft nor strike blow?"

"Gog's bones! Lady," grumbled the stolid Hildebrand, "ye speak well and angrily, but, nevertheless, Lord's hests—"

"Cowardly slave!" interrupted the Damoiselle, wert thou vassal of mine, the kites of heaven should tear thy gibbeted limbs! Oh! had I but the tithe of a man's strength! had I even the poor vigour of yonder Dwarf! why! that shrivelled abortion, give him but one spark of human apprehension, would fight in such a cause, bare-bosomed and naked-handed! aye, were it but with nails and teeth!"

The Minstrel, who had hitherto sat quietly upon an oak root, by the side of his courser, now started to his feet.

"Constance de Mowbray!" he exclaimed, "what wouldest thou?"

"Oh, man! man!" replied the Lady, with a

withering look, and pointing to the scene of unequal contest, “hast thou a human lip to ask, and *canst* thou ask?”

At this moment the bugle of the Opposers rang out another and a final peal ; and Constance, nothing doubting that it sounded for the onset, uttered as terrible a shriek as ever sounded upon a human ear ! it sent the Dwarf, bounding like a squirrel, into the greenwood—started the Minstrel to his saddle, and Hildebrand from his grasp—shook even the iron hand of Montgomery ; and upon the heart of Raymond knelled like the voice of approaching doom !

He threw his spear erect, and, with three bounds of his charger, was at her side.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I call thee Coward? I'll see thee d——d ere I call thee a Coward!"

Second Part of Henry the Fourth.

"Oh, Raymond!" exclaimed the agonized Constance, "wilt thou tear my very heart in sunder!"

"There is hope—still hope," was the reply; but the hollowness of the tones belied its import. "Yet," he added, "should the worst chance—farewell, dear Constance! a thousand and a thousand times farewell! Commend me to my noble Lord—bid him remember alike who fell—who fled."

"What, ho! Puckfist!" shouted the Minstrel, with the lungs of a Boanerges, at the same time making a demi-volte out of the press, "hither, I say, for thy life!"

The Dwarf bounded into the coppice, and again, almost with the speed of a greyhound, to the stirrup of his master. It seemed as if the hand of a demon gave to that of the latter the lance he had just before asserted to be lost in the forest. He next dislodged, from beneath the housings of the steed, a battle-axe and a mace, and slung them on either side of the saddle-bow.

"Now, Raymond of the Heart of Steel!" he cried, "and well dost thou deserve the name, I am with thee for life or death!"

"Thou!!" said the astonished Raymond.

"I," responded the new Champion. "But, first, gentle Squire, let me teach thee a trick of riddance, and how to make odds even!"

He dropped his charger's reins, placed his lance in the *rest*, and hung sidelong so as to balance it with the left hand, then seized the heavy mace with his right; and, as the three opposing riders came towards them, "devouring the earth with rage and fury," he hurled the ponderous missile full upon the mailed front of De Tunbridge, with such precision and force, that the luckless knight dropped from his saddle

as if a thunder-bolt had stricken him out of it ! His startled courser first bounded in advance of its fellows, then swerved and reared against Montgomery's, so as, for an instant, to break effectually the Marshal's career ; during which timely moment of prevention, the Minstrel rapidly gave aim to his couched lance, and spur and rein to his charger ; and all this was the work of so few seconds, that the shock of meeting was nearly simultaneous with the four remaining champions.

Of both encounters, the result showed that fortune no longer cared to divide her favours. Our young hero's lance struck full upon his adversary's (the leader's) gorget, and bore him at once headlong to the earth ; while he, whom we must yet call "the Minstrel," hurled his opponent from the saddle with a force and fury which literally drew cries of wonder from both parties, and threatened to make a long interval betwixt this and the Marshal's *next* display of horsemanship. He lay senseless and motionless, with the blood gushing from ears, lips, and nostrils.

"Now, by the club of St. Edmund!"* cried his lighter and less injured companion, gathering himself partially up, "thou hast done enough and to spare, for one night, Goodman Boy! give me thine hand, Sir Varlet, and help the Lord's Anointed to the saddle of King Fool! for *that* methinks were his fitting title henceforward."

"My gracious Liege!" said Raymond——

"Gracious! by St. George!" exclaimed the Monarch, in perfect possession of his temper, "they that be soundly beaten get grace, if nothing else, by their swinging!—so, so, so!" he added, looking around him; "here be goodly sights! Heaven's lambs have rough play!"

And, certes, it was no light or common spectacle which met the royal eyes at that moment; Montgomery passive upon the sod, grim, ghastly, and helpless as a corpse, in the hands of those who strove to recover him. De Aldery, in little better condition, still prostrate by his lamed charger; and the King himself, with blood streaming down his royal visage, and no very

* Meaning, we presume, the club with which the warlike spirit of that sainted Monarch is said to have killed the Danish King, Sweyn.

firm assurance of whole bones. Three of the best lances in Britain flung half-way to Purgatory for a mere whim, and two of them by a Stripling and a Harper!

At length, however, by dint of chafing, bathing, and unclasping, essences, elixirs, and so forth, the physical powers of the fallen were sufficiently restored to enable them to sit on their horses; De Aldery, for the honour of knighthood, being accommodated with a steed from the King's party.

Vanquished and victors now alike awaited the royal award.

“ Bring hither the Dame—the prize of the night’s tourney—let us behold of what stuff God and De Mowbray have fashioned her. Dost thou not hear, Sir Squire of the heavy hand? thou that hast not spared to shed the blood of a King for her baby-beauty—dispatch, I say!—And now, too, by St. Luke’s face! we will see who play the champion for De Mowbray against their sovereign liege. *Thee*, De Aldery, I know, and will, in brief time, give thanks befitting; but *present* vengeance is as a cup twice sweetened! and *here*” (grasping the minstrel’s bridle)

"is that which shall give victory to the vanquished ! What, ho ! Hugo de Montgomery ! thou art Lord High Marshal of England, attach me this Rider, of high treason, by the name of Stephen, Earl of Albemarle ! Earl and Minstrel, God wot ! errant Knight, and errant Traitor !"

"I thank you, Cousin King," said De Albemarle, "but the good Marshal may spare bootless labour. These glades are not the halls of Winchester or Gloucester ; and, quick-eyed as ye be, I have the vantage in speed of horse-hoof. There is no king but God in the greenwood, and at his hand have I taken grant of free-forestry, —Away !"

He swung his battle-axe aloft, and, dashing the rowels in his steed, broke at one bound from the royal grasp. Almost before an eye had time to wink, the dark glade upon the left swallowed him in its gloom ; and not a hand was lifted for arrest, nor a rein slackened for pursuit.

"Grammercy, my Father's sister's son !" muttered Rufus, half-audibly, "ye ride well, be it in field or forest—but I will have thy crown of flesh and bone, ere thou canst lay finger on mine of gold and velvet!"—then, aloud—"Heard

ye never a prophecy, fair Sirs, that Stephen of Albemarle shall lay low one of the highest heads in Britain? Perchance, Montgomery, it was even now fulfilled when *thine* rolled upon the turf—ha?"

"It was the highest head, Sir King," answered the Marshal, with a strong emphasis upon the superlative, "at least if Robert de Mowbray give a true version of the prophet's weird. For Stephen de Albemarle, king's kin although he be, I look yet to lay *his* head full low on a gory pillow!"

"Tush!" said the King, "all *a mort*, Sir Earl, for a cracked rib or twain? Why, good Sir Ilbert, methinks Montgomery were better upon the Marches, flaying the wild Welsh!"

"The jest had been fairer, my Liege," retorted Earl Hugo, "if the wild Welsh had not gone nigh to flay Montgomery—aye, by St. John, and your royal Grace to boot."

"I will make this gallant of De Mowbray's King of the West Marches," said Rufus, "and by St. Luke's face, *he* will keep ye all in whole skins, come Welshman, or come Devil!"

"Make De Albemarle King of the East,"

replied the Marshal, “and ye shall be right royally brothered on every hand ; for De Mowbray is already King of the North, whether ye list or not.”

“God save *her Grace* that shall be, then !” cried Rufus, lightly, as he saw a female form approaching; “Who amongst ye will win a Queen for his bride, with steel or gold ? Ilbert de Tunbridge, *thou art a gay man, par amours* ; have a quick eye to judge of this Damsel of the moonlight tournay.”

“Afore God,” said Sir Ilbert, “I know not if your Grace’s cousin, with his villainous maceflinging, hath left me an eye to know maid from man withal ! It is one thing to be thrust through, fair and knightly, and another to be brained like a swineherd, with a hundred weight of rusty iron flung as if from a catapult !”

“Right ;” said the King, “as it is one thing to be set upon fair and knightly for number, and another to be charged home with three spears levelled against one.”

Meanwhile, Constance de Mowbray, in all her native majesty and loveliness, drew near to the Monarch, her hand trembling in that of Ray-

mond. Even the ungentle William Rufus could not withhold some tribute of admiration—

“Now, by the rood of Lucca ! here is matter for a minstrel, were he from Heaven ! Beauty led on by Valour !”

The next instant she was at his foot.

“Up, Maiden !” he cried, “and away ! De Mowbray as thou art, I will keep faith with thee—or rather, with thy protector—for *his* sake, and for mine own. And tell thy rebellious Father, that but for such championship as I looked not all Britain could have given thee, thou hadst been hostage with me for his fealty, until he had bowed him to the dust of my palace-floor for thy release. Get hence ! but beware that I recal thee not with a strong hand, even from the towers of Bamborough ! What ! knowest thou not, pretty one, that I could choose for thee, and give thee no voice for aye or no, betwixt a convent and a bridal oath ?”

“Yes, mighty Sovereign,” replied Constance, slowly rising, and meeting his keen gaze with a look of disarming sweetness, “I know it—but I do not fear it.”

“Ha ! by St. Luke’s face ! dost thou not ?”

"No, great King," she replied, "because thou art *too* great to play the tyrant for revenge. Thou wouldest not stab De Mowbray through the bosom of his child!"

"Dost trust to *that*?" said Rufus, "a broken reed by'r Lady! away, smooth-face! little knowest thou of a King's revenge!"

"Something," replied Constance, with mingled dignity and gentleness, "something do I know of the revenge of *that* King, who, when a fettered rebel* dared once, in his very teeth, vent threats of what he *would* do were life and liberty yet his—bade him begone without a fetter, *take* life and liberty, and do his rebellious worst! The revenge of *that* King, at least, will not stoop to cruelty or meanness—it will not, to reach the guilty, trample with mailed foot upon the innocent."

When was there ever a king insensible to praise thus uttered, and thus timed?

"Now, by St. Luke's face!" cried the gratified Monarch, "if I were not William of England, I would right fain be Robert of Northumberland!"

* Heli, Lord of la Fleche.—Historical fact.

were it for nought else, or better, than to be the father of such a daughter!"

"Ere now, my sovereign Liege," said Constance, "kings have been named *the fathers of their people*, and, of all titles, deemed *that* the proudest. Be such to *me*, great King! bury not my young heart in a cloister! break it not with forced nuptials! Pledge me thy royal word of surety against these ills, and, if De Mowbray be indeed cold in obedience, by such nobleness thou shalt better conquer him than with the lances of a hundred hosts!"

"Knowest thou," said the King, "who parted hence but now, through yonder glade?"

The lady glanced anxiously round, and then firmly replied, "I do."

"Ha! dost thou so? and for what end he is thus fooling it with harp and dwarf?"

"There, mighty Sovereign," she replied, "the fetterlock is upon my lip. Guess, and —beware."

"Guess *thou*," exclaimed the King, "and beware the bolt that shall rend De Mowbray's oak, branch, stem, and root, if yonder rider

prosper in *one* purpose I wot of ! Look well to to *that*, gentle and clerkly one!"

"Aye, good my Liege," said Constance, "well—fearfully well ! Ere *that* purpose pros- pers, I know whose heart shall be torn from its weary bosom !"

"Even so?" replied the King ; then with a glance, or rather stare, at Raymond, "marry, and I marvel not. Get hence, Sir Squire ! thou hast earned thy prize a thousand fold, for, afore God and our Lady, he does well and knightly that, in four courses, keeps saddle and stirrup against the flower of English chivalry—they that have withstood champions from the four winds of Heaven. Begone ! with thy Sovereign's blood upon thy sword, and, if thou hast grace, profane it not henceforward with a stain of meaner gore. Go to—by St. Luke's face ! I forgive thee, and I love thee, boy ! But look—if within five days De Mowbray give me not his knee, yet other five, and I will have his head ! Say this, and swear it—my kingdom to a knight's fee thou art not forsworn ! *That*, too, shall be the last of thine own day of grace, wert thou as true in

faith as the Mother of Heaven, and as brave in act as the Father of Hell!"

Thus saying, the Monarch rode off, followed by his party, including De Aldery, whose condition, indeed, seemed little better than that of a prisoner. His parting words to Raymond conveyed a wish that he might yet live to do him fairer service.

"And I," exclaimed Montgomery, scowling like a black cloud when a storm gathers, and pointing with his huge finger to the dying charger he was compelled to abandon, "I will repay!"

Meanwhile, steeds had been led, and mounted on either side, by all except Constance and Raymond; the former, perhaps, awaiting the gentle offices of the latter; but he preserved a leaning posture against the noble animal which had borne him so gallantly in the tourney; one hand pressing the gathered folds of his cloak against his breast, the other grasping the *arcon*, or steel-bow of the saddle. The Monarch's praises—the Marshal's threats—De Aldery's farewell—nay, even the silvery-whispered gratitude of Constance, had but one and the same answer from

Raymond—namely, a silent inclination of the head, each one lowlier than the last, and followed by a feebler, slower resumption of the erect position.

But when the field was altogether abandoned to them, and her champion still remained silent and motionless, a pang of alarm shot through the breast of Constance ; she uttered his name twice in quick loud accents ; then slowly withdrew the bosomed hand, and found that her own was dabbled with blood from the saturated folds of the riding cloak—in short, that he was rapidly becoming insensible. Her strength availed only to break and not to prevent his fall. Hildebrand and others sprang from their saddles,—he was partially raised—the lady neither shrieked nor fainted, but stanchéd and bound the wound with a part of her own attire. Then the fingers of a thin and shrivelled hand, thrust under the youth's nostril a phial of powerful essence—it was the hand of Puckfist, who wriggling his strange body through the press, looked with a glassy eye upon the patient's bloodless face.

With the first symptom of effect from his restorative, the Dwarf blew a shrill and prolonged

note upon a tiny bugle of silver, hung from his neck. Its last echo had scarcely died away, when a sound of approaching hoofs gave answer —then a mounted Cavalier issued, at a hand-gallop, from the glade upon the left, and when Raymond unclosed his eyes, their first glance was upon the face of Constance—their next upon that of Stephen de Albemarle.

“*Thou here?*” exclaimed the Lady.

“I,” replied the Earl; “to horse, Constance de Mowbray, and away! the fortune of the night is mine; but with my heart’s blood will I buy life and safety for this gallant boy. Set on, my masters! there is a stream nigh-hand, and beyond, a hermit’s chapelry; there will we play the leech.”

Gently, but peremptorily, he committed Constance to the saddle. As gently was Raymond lifted into his, and supported there, partly by a scarf, passed round both arcons, partly by De Albemarle, on the one side, and Hildebrand on the other, while a third assistant led the steed by the rein.

They entered the right hand glade, rode for a few minutes in almost total darkness, and then

emerged upon the bank of the promised stream, and saw its rapid waters dance and sparkle in the setting moon-ray. Its breadth might be from six to eight yards, and, where at the narrowest, was spanned by a bridge of rude wood-work, inartificially propped from beneath by diagonal supports resting in crevices of the rocks, which, on either side, presented themselves as natural abutments; the bed of the stream lying, for some distance, at a considerable depth below.

Beyond, and apparently on the verge of another tract of woodland, appeared the hermitage, or chapelry, spoken of by De Albemarle. On the nearer side, some alders and magnificent pollard ashes shadowed both stream and bridge. As the party approached, they heard the bell of the solitary, "taking no note of time, but by its loss," that is to say, tolling with such capricious irregularity that even the fat-eared Hildebrand swore, by Gog's bones, the priest had been saying mass to a blither saint than the Virgin, and had palsied his rope-hand with lifting the black-jack.

"Ho! who art thou?" cried De Albemarle, as a dark figure rose, spectre-like, upon the bridge.

"One of twain that serve God and Saint Hubert in this wilderness," replied a deep voice from under cowl ; "Who be ye that ask?"

"Wayfarers, with a sick youth, and a wearied maid," answered Stephen, "Arise, therefore, in haste, Sir Priest, and gird up thy loins, to shew path and spread couch ; to pour wine and oil, and cover thy multitude of sins."

"Benedicite, my son!" replied the Recluse, "thou, and thy sick and weary, shall have rest."

"Aye, and for ever!" said another voice, which seemed to issue from the alder bushes.

"Follow him not!" said Raymond, with a momentary renewal of consciousness, but the words were too feebly uttered to be regarded.

"Hither, my children;" said the Hermit, "ye shall eat of our loaf, and drink of our cup, and we will cherish ye for God's love in the wilderness."

The voice from the alders was again heard,—
" 'Lean upon me,' quoth the broken staff to the sick man!"

"It is an evil spirit!" cried the Solitary, "Avoid thee Satan ! and follow in God's name *mes filz*, but not on your barbed chargers ! the

bridge is frail, and, peradventure will perish under the prancing hoof."

"Now a curse upon rotten planks!" exclaimed the Earl, "is it thus that ye lurdane priests pay *brig-bote*?* How fares it with thee, gentle Raymond? Canst thou pad the hoof, for a bow-shot space, to yonder chapel?"

"For thy life, Sir Squire," said the hidden monitor, "pass neither on foot or horse over this bridge! Dost thou not know who warns thee?"

But Raymond, once more, neither knew, nor heard, nor saw, nor felt. De Albemarle perceived it, "Bring water from the stream!" he cried, "what, Puckfist! ho! thy phial!" then, bending over the pallid brow of his charge, he added, "deaf ear—mute tongue!"

"Mary-mother!" exclaimed the voice, "dead!"

"Fast travelling the blind path," said the Earl, "if good help come not the speedier!"

"Water! water from the stream!" shrieked Constance, in a voice of terror, "I will fill the

* *Brig-bote*.—Contributions levied for the repair of bridges. *Brig-bote*, *Burg-bote*, and *Expeditio*, were the "*Trinodes necessitas*," to which the clergy as well as laity were liable.

hand that brings it with coins of gold ! Merciful heaven ! he perishes within foot's breadth of aid ! Trust the good father, noble Earl, and heed not this shrouded wrangler !”

“ Every inch a woman !” said the counsellor thus disparaged, “ her own way, if it lead to ruin and death ! Shudder at a snail, and take an adder by the fangs !”

“ Have done, screech-owl !” cried De Albemarle, “ and let the weary and the wounded find rest and leech-craft where God hath stored them.”

“ I swear to thee, Sir Earl, if Earl thou art,” replied the concealed one, “ that in crossing this bridge, ye are jumping from safe paths into pits and calthrops ! hold the stream's course, if ye will ; but, for your lives, upon *this* bank ! Anon it slopes gently down to the water's edge—no leech like that, with its cool and healing crystal. Thereafter, I promise ye, a guide shall not be lacking to show safe ford and path.”

Regardless of this advice, De Albemarle strode upon the bridge. He felt and acknowledged its insecurity, but saw that for some con-

siderable distance, at least, the stream was not likely to be fordable.

"Bind every man his steed to branch and root," he exclaimed, "and, do thou, good Father, lead on to thy sanctum. I" (lifting the powerless Raymond from the saddle, and poising him upon his sinewy shoulder), "I will play the nurse with this stricken babe—pray Heaven, Sir Priest, thy crazy foot-planks break not under their twin-burden!"

"Oh, fear it not!" said Constance, her whole soul absorbed in the fate of Raymond, and throwing herself upon the bridge, as if to cross the Rubicon.

"Thy hand, Daughter!" cried the Solitary, seizing it with more of energy than became his age and office, and dragging, rather than conducting, her along the planks.—Once across—

"Away!" he cried, exultingly, and instantly the plunging hoofs of a steed, and the thrilling shriek of a victim, told the whole truth to the duped and vainly-warned De Albemarle. Still grasping his burden, and raving upon the archers to follow, he rushed upon the bridge, at the

very instant, unhappily, that another voice thundered out the single ominous word, “strike !”

Prompt and deadly was the hatchet-stroke that fell upon the groaning props below ; and, in an instant, the whole structure, bridge and passengers, crashed heavily into the stream. The disturbed waters foamed for a moment over the bodies of both warriors ; but a willow-branch met the clutch of De Albemarle ; and, while clinging to that with one hand, he managed with the other to save his luckless companion, holding his powerless head above the surface of the tide.

“Gog’s bones !” shouted the astounded Hildebrand, to Nicholas de L’Epée, as the latter sprang from his nest to help the fallen ; “what means all this ?”

“It means,” replied the son of Jodesac, “that Wisdom is an ass to warn Folly from the trap of a knave ! it means, thou rubicond roysterer ! that ye have flung the Damoiselle into the devil’s claws ! but, come,” he added, “let us fish for fools !”

And they assisted the drenched Earl and his burden out of their unexpected bath.

Dripping and daggled as he was, and loaded with mud and clay, De Albemarle yet sprang into his saddle.

“Play thou the leech!” he cried aloud to Puckfist; “and ye that be men, to horse and follow! oh, fool! fool! fool!” with which self-philippic, he rode headlong to where the bank shelved down to the water, plunged into the ford, and was soon lost in the further woodland.

Obeying mechanically, and pursuing they knew not what, Hildebrand and his little troop started also every man to the chase, leaving only De L’Epée and the Dwarf with the still powerless Raymond. But when Du Coci, whom the shriek of Constance had summoned at a rapid gallop, arrived upon the spot, he found no living thing except his own good squire; and he, for once, chap-fallen and silent enough, being stretched at full length, senseless, upon the turf. The good spirits of Nicholas, it afterwards appeared, had suffered this “syncope” by virtue of a tremendous buffet from some hand alike ungentle and unseen; a buffet cogent

enough to have shivered like a nut-shell some thinner and less hardy craniums.

The wounded Raymond, and the chirurgeonly Dwarf, were gone; *where*, or *how*, no human being remained to say.

END OF VOLUME II.



R U F U S

OR

THE RED KING

A ROMANCE

"He feared God but little—man not at all."

WILLIAM OF MALMESBURY.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III

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RUFUS.

CHAPTER I.

" — A violent altercation ensued, and the King, in the height of his passion, addressing himself to the Constable, exclaimed, 'Sir Earl, by God, you shall either go or hang.'— 'By God, Sir King,' replied Hereford, 'I will neither go nor hang!' and he immediately departed with above thirty other considerable Barons."

Hume's History of England.

" 'Who made thee Count?' demanded Hugh Capet of a refractory Noble, 'The same right that made thee King,' was the bold reply."

Crowe's History of France.

" Having formed a scheme for checking the growing power of the nobles, Robert Bruce summoned them to appear, and shew by what rights they held their lands. Being assembled, and the question put, they started up at once and drew their swords—' By these,' said they, ' we acquired our lands, and with these we will defend them !' This, notwithstanding Robert's popular and splendid virtues, occasioned a dangerous conspiracy against his life."

Robertson's History of Scotland.

FIVE days after the events narrated in our last, Robert de Mowbray was proclaimed a traitor at the cross of Winchester, his title and government annulled, and all his possessions confiscated to the crown. This blow, however, even from the hand of a powerful monarch, was not always of instant avail against the spirit indicated in our mottos, the stubborn genius of feudal aristocracy.

Upon the sixth morning, Alberic du Coci burst suddenly, and with streaming brow and flashing eyes, into the presence of the King and Flambard,

“News, mighty Sovereign!” he exclaimed, hurrying to the royal foot, and flinging himself upon one knee, almost breathless with haste and excitement.

“News! thou son of a Flemish harlot!” said the King. “*What* news, Brazen-brow? they should be passing good, in amends of thy saucy bluntness!”

“Pardon, my gracious Liege,” returned the vassal, “hot love forgets cold form. My news are passing evil, if your Grace stir not with the fairer speed for their telling. The arch-rebel, De Mowbray, is up and doing with a mighty power in the North! He hath spread banner at York, at Durham, at Alnwick, and at Bambo-

rough ; and, at the four gates of each, with voice of herald and blast of trumpet, proclaimed Stephen de Albemarle, King of England."

Rufus bounded from his seat.

"Oh, spacious villain!" he cried, "Oh, mighty traitor ! hath he but *one* head ? *one* life ? King, saidst thou ? Oh, monstrous Rebel ! hast thou a dog, Du Coci, that would lap Earl's blood, ha ?"

"Better, my Liege," said the Knight, "a sword to shed it for your Grace, if it be God's pleasure ; but, by my faith, there will lack ten thousand besides, and sharp and true ones. Stephen himself——"

"Ho ! what of *him* ?" shouted the Monarch—"what of our traitor-cousin, in Hell's name ?—what of the doubly-damned De Albemarle ?"

"Sped to De Mowbray," answered Sir Alberic ; "some say at York—some further south ; but, all agree, with a vast strength, levied in the midland shires as he trooped north. Their numbers, or equipment, or what traitor-names have joined them, as leaders or as allies, God knows, my Sovereign Liege, not I."

"Why ! we will march and see ! What recks it ? ho ! summon De Miles ! where sleeps Montgomery in this pinch ? Get *thee* to bed, good Ranulph ; no market now for thy politic wares."

"Tush—tush, my Liege—fairer than ever," said Flambard; "wit is sharper than steel, and shall yet be at higher price. Hark, Du Coci, where didst *thou*, of all men, basket up these tidings?"

"Further north," replied Sir Alberic, "than I have knowledge of tower and town to tell ye. I have been scouring in bootless quest of one that fiends, surely, have snatched from earth, and met, by the way, with those who had fast knowledge that this is sooth; the rather, that they themselves were hot upon the spur to join King Stephen—I pray Heaven and your Grace to pardon me the word."

"Oh, gracious fool!" cried Rufus, "to let hence his prating daughter and her champion! Thou wert right, Ranulph—it is they that have carried the lit torch to this pile of treason! He waited but for *them*—ha!"

"He had waited long, then, my Liege," said Du Coci, "for well do I believe that they have never yet crossed Ouse or Trent. Sleepers in strange beds they, I warrant them, since the night of the forest-tourney. If *one*, indeed, be not pillow'd in Abraham's bosom, as priests say."

"Dally not with riddling words, for thy soul!" exclaimed the King. "What knowest thou of De Mowbray's squire and daughter?"

"Nought of the first," replied the Knight, "save that he bled and swooned, and, anon, vanished, as though the earth that drank his blood, had devoured his body also. But, for the maiden, I beseech your Grace, bid Reginald de Lacy say, what panting thing of cries and shrieks and struggles cumbered *his saddle* four nights agone, in the forest northward hence."

"Ha!" exclaimed the King.

"As the devil willed it," continued Du Coci, "there were deep waters running betwixt us, or, child as she is of my worst foe, I had marred his racing with the lovely burden."

"Black-bearded villain!" said Rufus. "His head shall answer it. What! nothing but tricks of treason? Whither away, my Lord Justiciary?"

"To summon aid and council, I," said Flambard, "and that with such speed as horse, and herald, and trumpet-call can do it. By God, my Liege, we must have gold! if it be dug for in men's hearts, where, as I live and breathe, I think the greedy villains hide it from us in these pinches. For what with these accursed Welsh wars; and your Grace's over-sea doings; and building huge halls and castles, and fair dwellings, forsooth, for lurdane priests and joult-

headed friars ; and granting boons to all askers ; and giving largesses as though your exchequer were a heaped mountain ; I can tell ye, Sir King, monies have grown rarer with us here in Winchester than unicorn's horns."

And, thus saying, the Procurator Fiscal vanished from the chamber.

"Command me, mighty Sovereign," said Du Coci, "whither must *I* the whilst this storm is brewing ?"

"Northward," said Rufus, "as though a legion of fiends drove thee ! or, by my Father's soul ! lacking De Waleric for their fence, our towers of Monkchester-on-Tyne will fall into the Rebel's hands."

"Past prayer, my Liege," replied the Knight, "for, if the black truth must out, they are already stormed and taken."

The Monarch stamped with a fury that shook the oaken chamber, and filled it with the dust of the strewed rushes. Fortunately, however, the sudden entrance of Montgomery and De Miles, whom the Justiciary had opportunely met in the castle-hall, broke upon his idle paroxysms. Immediately all were in their element. There was sparkling of fierce eyes ; grasping of hands : swearing of bitter oaths ; and rapid suggestion

of measures better fitted for wreaking the royal anger than frantic words and gestures.

“For thy life, Du Coci,” said Flambard, “ride thou with the Lord Marshal’s hests, whither he bids, and see that twenty pursuivants-at-arms (less may not serve), be here in tabard and in saddle within an hour. Our writs to every Sheriff in the realm must fly with their best wings; or towns and towers beyond the Trent will fall to the rebels by the round score, ere we have power a-foot to strike a stroke !”

“Write then, good Ranulph,” said the King, “Dispatch—dispatch! Bid the stout Sheriffs ride day and night, and summon all ‘twixt sixty and sixteen. If they slumber or tarry,—fire-brand and battle-axe for that! God’s curse upon the sleepy villains that lost our Castle-upon-Tyne! aye, and on *thee*, Du Coci, if thou amend not the evil chance with speed. Away! we will take thought to give thee needful force.”

Sir Alberic hurried from the chamber. De Tunbridge and a few other of the higher crown-vassals, joined the royal military conclave; and, on the other hand, the Chamberlain, the Chancellor, and the Treasurer were summoned in aid of the toiling Flambard, whose active mind had already determined upon a hundred measures.

We pass to the *Great Council*, which, by the hour of noon, was assembled with a fulness that crowded even that vast hall to excess. Every Baron that the festival had drawn to Winchester, lay and spiritual, was there. No man caring or daring to be absent after a summons so peremptory. Instantly as the Monarch assumed his throne, a herald, upon the Marshal's right hand, blew three times a warning trumpet-note of proclamation ; and then, another, upon the left, stepping a little in advance, announced in a loud voice the rebellion of De Mowbray and De Albemarle. A mixed sound of surprise and execration rose and swelled on every side ; but, when the King, starting to his feet, demanded “What comfort and what counsel his loyal lieges gave him in such straits?” every lay-baron present, except two, followed the example of Montgomery and De Miles, who, suddenly, drawing their heavy swords, and waving them aloft, swore a deep oath, that “with those and their good lances alone they would give comfort and counsel to their Sovereign !”

“I go, my Liege,” said the Marshal, “to fling abroad the first of a thousand banners; but, were ten lances the full muster of your battle against the high traitor, De Mowbray, one of the

ten were I ! So help me God and his liege-saint, St. George !”

“ And I !” exclaimed the Constable.

“ And I !” echoed De Tunbridge.

“ And I !” broke in full concert from the assemblage ; followed by a shout of acclamation which seemed to ring and vibrate along the bannered walls, and the carved roof-work of the hall.

“ Now, by St. Luke’s face ! these are sounds for a King’s ear and a King’s heart ; aye, and a King’s thanks, were he the best and strongest that ever yet was bearded by rebellion ! Thanks, therefore, my loyal and right-trusty lieges ! But, look ?—” he added, pointing to the *two* whom we have already alluded to as exceptions—“ Even in this goodly quiver there are broken shafts. Marshal of England, ask yonder Knights, if such they be, why they, and they alone, fling scorn upon our presence with shut lips, sheathed brands, and scowling brows ? scorn upon us, we say, and every token of others fealty. Bid them make answer, on their lives.”

There was a dead silence, as Rufus—his eye kindling, though he retained his seat, continued to point alternately to the objects of his resentment ; whom the general enthusiasm, indeed,

now placed in strong and ungracious contrast with all around.

Montgomery strode midway between the parties malecontent ; but they did not wait to be formally challenged.

“ Marshal of England,” said Hugh-le-Loup, his voice hoarse and tremulous with passion, “ ask yonder King and his Justiciary, if it be sooth, that, at the banquet of yester-even, whither nor I nor mine were bidden guests, the hand and dowry of Maud de Aquila, *my* kinswoman and ward, were gaged, by a royal oath, as price and guerdon for De Mowbray’s head, struck off by whatsoever hand ? Ask this and give me answer.”

The words were scarcely uttered before Reginald de Lacy, upon *his* part also, confronted the Earl of Shrewsbury, and began with a like haughty formula.

“ Marshal of England, ask yonder King and his Justiciary, if it be sooth, that, in the list of towns in Normandy, marked out for grinding levies of men and arms—or, failing these, of such scutage-tax as would drain every coffer within their walls—*my* town of Mans be also written down : *mine* by the self-same right that seats his father’s son upon yon throne of England. Ask this, and give me answer.”

The audacity of these questions seemed literally to suspend the breath of all who heard. But the spirit of the Conqueror had boiled up in William Rufus.

“ Now by the Mother of Heaven !” he exclaimed, starting to his feet, “ I am answered ! and will *make answer*, were it the first and the last time that ever a true King answered a false traitor !—”

“ Traitor !” cried Hugh-le-Loup, turning fiercely upon the Sovereign, “ Thy father, Sir King, thy mightier and more kingly father, had other speech and other bearing for one who was of the first and strongest to buckle mail, and scatter treasure, that a poor feudatory Duke might be transmewted into a free Monarch. But let pass. Sword nor treasure of mine shall out till I be answered touching this banquet boast. Is’t sooth or not ?”

The King, who, it is said, for the first time in his life, looked *white* with passion instead of *red*, strode up to the offended and offending Earl, and, with a glare which Lopus hardly sustained, replied from between his grinding teeth :—

“ Sooth, thou audacious villain ! sooth as Heaven ! Art answered ? ha ? Why, we have pampered thee with gifts and favour till pride and swollen surquedry gorge thee to cracking !

But, know, thou full-fed banqueter upon the fruits of mine and my dead father's largesse, that I will yet work my pleasure with thee for good or evil ; aye, as the potter with his clay, mould thee to what I list ; and *where*, and *when* ; thee, and thine earldom ; treasure, and sword and life ; thy gross body—" he added, scornfully, " and *thy fair kinswoman ! gnash fangs at that*, Sir Wolf ! For, as I live and breathe, the daughter of De Aquila is no more ward of thine than she is Queen of Heaven."

Rage and insulted pride seemed to dilate even the full portly dimensions of Hugh *Vras*.

" Now, afore God and his holy saints !" he exclaimed, " from the crown of thy head downward, and from the sole of thy foot upward, William of England ! thou art, past thought and speech, a matchless tyrant ! if it stand *thus* with Maud de Aquila "

" If !" vociferated the King, stamping furiously—" sound trumpets yet again !"

And, as the heralds obeyed, he strode heavily upon the steps of the throne, but without seating himself—then—as the peal of the horn died away—

" *Here*," he continued, " though tampering with rebellion hath barred thee from our ban-

quets, *here*, at least, thou art a guest, bidden or unbidden ; and here let thy own ears warn thee. Mark ! He that shall bring the traitor De Mow-bray's head,—hacked off, or still upon the rebel trunk, it recks not ;—now, by my sceptre and my soul ! on *Him* (be he the meanest horse-boy of our camp !) on *him* will I bestow this vaunted beauty, this Maud de Aquila ; for wife, for slave, for strumpet, or what not, even as his pleasure is ! she, and her every knight's-fee, manor and tower, forest and field. Our Lord Justiciary, and thou, Earl Marshal, look that a herald-at-arms make proclamation thus, at every market cross and city gate."

The Earl of Chester struck with both hands clenched upon a brow literally black with contending passions ; and it seemed to all present as if the violence of his emotions must find speedy vent, either in execrations or tears. A struggle, fearful while it lasted, gave him mastery over both. Pacing slowly, but with little firmness, through the hall, he passed the King, the Marshal, and the Justiciary, and, taking from his baldric the sword which we have elsewhere said was given to him by the Conqueror, delivered it, without a word, into the hand of De Miles. As the constable received

it with reluctant awkwardness, Lupus pointed to the inscription upon the blade, “*Hugo comes Cestria,*” and then, with shaken finger, to the chafed Rufus, whose burning eye followed the gesture, well understanding it as a tacit renunciation of allegiance upon the Earl’s part.

The latter, with recovered firmness of step, but looking deadly pale, then made for the hall door, saying to the Barons who thronged between,—

“I pray you let me pass;—this hall grows hot.”

“Wouldst cool thee in the North;” said Rufus, “ha, Cousin Earl?”

“My Lord of Chester,” said Flambard, speaking now for the first time, “is cousin also to De Albemarle; look well, my Liege, to that. If choice between be question of *near blood*, a sparrow’s feather will turn the scale.”

“Hell-born and bred!” exclaimed the Earl, “mine is indeed the blood of kings, and dost thou, mean, undescended caitiff! dare to lift finger or wag tongue against me?”

“Not,—” replied the sneering Favourite, as he held before him the intercepted letter from De Mowbray, and pointed, insultingly, to the bitter passage—“‘if thou canst leave turning and

changing, and blowing hot and cold with the same breath, and looking now backward, now forward—' ha ? mighty Earl !—"

The hand of Lupus was upon his dagger ; but so also was the hand of another upon him, and a voice murmured, "Not yet, nor *here*—be calm."

He "*looked* daggers, but used none," and again moved for the door.

"Tarry," said the King, "and take again thy sword. Aye, and an oath upon its cross-hilt, under the beards of these holy bishops and abbots, that thou wilt meet us, in five days, with all thy power, levied both west and east of Offa's Dyke.—"

The Earl indeed took back the sword, but it was only to throw it upon the lowest step of the throne ; "I will meet thee, Cousin King," he said equivocally, "*with all my power.*"

"Attach him of high treason ;" said the Justiciary, and the Marshal passed between Lupus and the door, but did not lay hand upon him, nor repeat the words of arrest ; for there was that in the eyes of every Baron near, which admonished forbearance. The Earl of Chester, indeed, could draw no assurance or countenance from his own baronage of the Palatinate ; the GREAT COUNCIL being formed exclusively of Crown-

I look for rebuke at your Grace's hand, nor that the voice of all your lieges should thus be surety for Hugh Lupus' faith ; I pray God, their pledges be redeemed ! and touching the hot words of arrest your Grace reproves me for, I say but as it is written, (if these holy bishops be well remembered,) ‘ The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up.’”

He stretched his arm towards the Marshal, who, in his turn, waved for free passage to the Earl of Chester. All fell back with alacrity, to mark their triumph over the Minister ; and, with a measured step, without a single word of parting reverence, Hugh-le-Loup quitted the royal hall.

CHAPTER II.

“ Up Willy ! waur them a’ man ! ”

Old Scotch Song.

DE LACY’s single head was now bare to the royal fury ; but he took assurance from the impunity of Lupus. The Monarch too, politic even in extreme passion, and conscious of the weakness of his prerogative against the indomitable spirit of his nobles, thus leagued in defence of their common rights, shunned the mortification of apparent defeat, by assuming a new character. He exchanged his high tone of kingly resentment for the bold indifference and sarcastic levity which distinguished him in ordinary moments.

“ Tush ! ” he exclaimed, with a half-laugh ; “ it is the breathing time of day with our plump cousin of Chester ; and, if the testy gentleman break custom, choler and fat may choke him. Let pass, my lords, and think we of these northern villains. What muster make we of true

men to beard them? What foes are certain? and what friends are hollow? Lord Marshal, thy heart is in the war-saddle? Milo de Miles! rough-tongued as thou art, do I not know thee trusty as forged steel? Reginald de Lacy," he added, as the dark Baron stood forward, with the air of one who was determined to be answered; "thy power lies northward; I look to hear that thou art foremost to cripple the rebel's strength. Look well to thy towers of Newark."

"I will, my Liege," replied the Baron, "and to my towers of *Mans*, moreover, if grace be given me. What answer makes *your Grace*, as touching *them*?"

"That they are thine, good Reginald, as heretofore," answered the King, "while thou canst yet so dream, and awake not."

"Dreamed, have I?" said De Lacy. "Your Grace is gamesome with me. Dreamed? How, if I answer in like mood, that I sleep fast, and will dream on till I have dreamed away this dream of life?"

"Put me not to make trial of thee," rejoined Rufus. "Mans is *my city*, and there an end. Who knows not that my royal Father won it with bow and spear?"

"Who knows not," replied the Baron, "that he released it to my sire by composition, when men and arms were lacking to make Duke William King of this realm of England?"

"Where be the vouchers?" said Rufus with a bitter smile; "shew me *them*, good Reginald; for we remember not these matters of chapsmanship and brokerage."

"Deal not with me as with a babe, my Liege," said De Lacy. "Look," and he pointed to a cross, figured in red, upon his mantle, "I am bound to the Holy Land; and in the name of Him for whose tomb I am to do battle, and before these, his holy servants, I do demand a pledge from thee, Sir King, that Mans be left in peace while I am absent."

"In peace, I pledge ye," answered the Monarch; "God's peace and mine, when I have spread my banner upon its walls; but not his or theirs that shall lift finger to gainsay me. Go where ye list in this holy humour, Sir Baron; but first, if thou be vassal of mine, levy me fit strength, under fit leading, to fight these rebels at home; this, or pay scutage to the full; we give thee choice."

"My oath," persisted De Lacy, "was taken for the Holy War before I knew of this rebellion;

and, for my city of Mans, I hold it by hereditary right, as thou, Sir King, thy throne. If ye dispute my just succession, appeal we to King Philip, and I will plead my cause before the proper court."

"I will plead with ye," rejoined the King; "but my lawyers shall be right keen ones; lances and swords and arrows; be sure of that, great Baron."

"Then by the blessed cross which I have taken," exclaimed De Lacy, "I will mark that holy sign upon banner and shield, helm and mantle, surcoat and saddle, horse and tent; and so departing, as Christ's servant, leave my just cause to his holy keeping!"

"Do as ye list," repeated the Monarch, unmoved by a threat then considered so awful. "I seek not to make war upon Crusaders; but I will have the lands my Father had; aye, every hide and oxgang! Therefore, bestir thee, holy champion, and bar well thy gates, and look with good heed to thy bounding walls; for by God and our Lady, I will visit ye anon with a hundred thousand lances at my back!"

"And by God and our Lady!" iterated the provoked vassal, with like impious energy, and while his black brow grew yet blacker, "long

shall ye knock, and loud, ere one of a thousand gain entrance!—But I am answered, mighty King; and, under favour, will forthwith depart, to give mine household hint of preparation for such honour.

‘When bale is at highest
Boot is nighest——’ ”

and, with this doggrel proverb of consolation, he turned to quit the hall.

“ Tarry,” cried Rufus. “ Thou hast done me good service, Reginald de Lacy, and I would thank thee for it.”

“ Now grace forbid your Grace should be so gracious!” said the Baron scornfully. “ God keep me from the gratitude of Kings!”

“ The devil will not have it so,” rejoined Rufus. “ For, in the ears of all this presence, I thank thee *that thou hast made prisoner Constance de Mowbray*. Nay, wince not, pious Reginald! It was as *hostage*, doubtless, for her rebel father, and, by St. Luke’s face! better worth than a thousand others! But *thou*, Champion of holy men and sepulchres! art no meet keeper for a buxom damsel; give up, if ye be wise; have her within these walls with thy best speed; and look—” added the sarcastic

Monarch, suddenly lowering his deep harsh tones, "look that the casket be unbroken, and the gem safe. Dost thou understand me, *chaste* journeyer to Jerusalem?"

"I hear," replied the Baron. "But it boots not. Lay charge upon others, Sir King, and chief upon Stephen de Albemarle, who snatched the banquet from my lips, and is like, ere this, to have fed full upon't himself. By St. Anthony, I play not the hypocrite; I had worked my pleasure with the fair fool, and denied it not when done; but the good Earl, your cousin, took me at disadvantage, rent the spoil from the spoiler, and left me upon the forest-turf with the blood running from my breast like a conduit. Why! who sees not that I am haggard as a sick priest, and flesh-shrunken to the very ribs?"

And, in fact, the appearance of the speaker corroborated his assertion; for in and face alike bearing token of recent pain and sickness.

"But, here," he continued, as the venerable Archbishop Anselm entered the hall, "here cometh one through whom, as I live and breathe, I will appeal to Rome touching my city of Mans—I, a soldier of the cross, against your grasping Grace that will not stir finger for

saint or sepulchre, although the great Devil himself were up and doing, listing rather to tarry here at home to pill and plunder the absent chivalry of Christendom."

"Blasphemous hypocrite!" said the King, "*thou* a soldier of the cross! that believest not either in Heaven or Hell! get hence, and levy force, thou'dst best. Once levied, if thou depart my realm ere we have fought De Mow-bray, set not foot in it again, or I will hang thee, traitor! and so look to it."

"Hear him, holy Father!" said De Lacy, "hear the Christian King threaten Christ's champion with a dog's death, for doing the work of Mother Church in the far East!"

"Both thou and he," resumed the King, "shall first do *my* work in the West. Look thou, Archbishop of Canterbury, that thy levies of men and arms, in this rebellious day, be far other than those for our Welsh wars of late. Send me not again such fleshless scarecrows upon skeleton steeds; milk-livered caitiffs upon spavined jades; the very scum of Saxon filth and wretchedness in all thy manors; the very jest and hissing of our camp. By St. Luke's face, Prelate, I tell thee, if thou again dost me such scorn, I will send thee to joll horns with the

Bishop of Ostia, whom, without my leave, thou hast saucily made Pope in my dominions."

It is not our province here to do justice to the calm courage with which Anselm refused plainly to furnish a single man-at-arms for the approaching struggle. *Once* had he compromised the solemn dignity of his office ; but not again would he do so to be Primate of the whole earth. The King should have his benediction and his prayers ; but he would fight with no other weapon.

"As the Lord liveth," concluded the old man, "I will not again bid vassal of mine strike with the arm of flesh, till He that is King of kings, with his own dread voice, and in his own dread time, bids me be zealous even to slaying!"

It was in vain that Rufus heaped invectives upon him for his doggedness, and swore that he "hated him yesterday—hated him to-day—and would hate him still worse to-morrow."—Anselm replied only by gently shaking his head, as he appealed to some of those present who had urged his acceptance of the Primacy, "Said I not that ye were joining, in the same plough, an untamed bull with an old and feeble sheep ? Said I not, that the sheep would be dragged by her fierce yoke-mate through thorns, and stakes,

and briars, till she had lost wool, and milk, and lambs, and was useless?"

"Aye, by St. Luke's face, holy Sheep!" said the King, "and thou *shalt* be dragged, whither we list to plough! and if thy wool, and milk, and lambs, be typical of men, and arms, and treasures, we will have tythe of thee, of each and all,—be sure of that?"

"*Treasures* wouldst thou?" said Anselm, "in *this temple*" (pressing his bosom) "mammon and lucre are as accursed things—they have no worship. But shall I give of our holy patrimony to be the price of blood? Shall I pour it out upon him who grasps the revenues of vacant sees and abbeys, and had rather the bereayed flocks perished than bid fresh shepherds feed and nourish them?"

"Why, what is that to thee?" said Rufus. "Are not the abbeys mine? Do ye as ye list with *your* farms, and I will do as I list with *my* abbeys. By St. Luke's face! ye that be the Lord's servants shall do somewhat for the Lord's anointed! and with a liberal hand in this crying pinch. Ten thousand merks have I disbursed to my brother Robert, that *he*, too, like the pious Reginald de Lacy there, may do *your* work and fight *your* battles in Palestine—and shall

your holy shoulders alone be quit of the general burden?"

"Pardon, great King," said the Prelate; "but if thou hast given treasure to thy brother, hast thou not thy brother's Dukedom in gage? Is it not thine to bend or break? We, of the groaning clergy, can bear no added burden, unless we grind to the very earth the wretched farmers upon our lands."

"What!" exclaimed William, "have ye no caskets of silver and of gold, full of dead men's bones? ha?"

There was a general movement of uneasiness at this bold impiety, as well amongst laics as clergy; but none of the latter had courage or principle to back the Primate in his opposition.

"I go," said the latter, "to take counsel of our Holy Father in Rome. Brethren of the Church — fellow-labourers in this vineyard of tares, tell me if herein *your* hearts are as *my* heart; and if your words shall be as my words—pronounce unto me ere I go hence."

"Verily, Father Anselm," said one of the mitred Dignitaries appealed to, "herein we have taken counsel, and herein we cannot *soar up to thy sublimity*."

"Go you, then," said the Archbishop solemnly,

“to your Lord ; but, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord our God !”

He then took, from the hands of one who waited, a pilgrim's staff and scrip ; lifted up his eyes to Heaven ; bestowed a benediction upon the King, and departed.

The Council, soon after, broke up.

“ Shaven hypocrite !” said Rufus, when he and Flambard were alone, “ if he go hence, I will strip me his farms and manors bare as the fallow glebe.”

“ Something must we do, my Liege,” said the Justiciary, “ if it be nothing better than stripping abbey roofs of their lead ; and the fair aisles beneath of those foolish pixies and chalices, and jewelled crosses, and embroidered nothings that the peeled gluttons are so fain to doat on. Come ! take we thought, my Liege, which holy sheep must first to the shearing !—”

While these and like resolutions were passing in the royal privacy, other passions found vent in the several chambers of Hugh Lupus and Reginald de Lacy ; where the former poured out his whole boiling heart into the ear of Matilda ; and the latter, with a fierce eloquence, shook down the already tottering allegiance of De Tunbridge. Reginald had indeed no heavy task ;

provoked and disgusted as was now the haughty, vain, and selfish Sir Ilbert, with the King's threatened disposal of his promised bride, Matilda. We say, *promised*, Rufus having allowed him to retire from a previous audience, fully trusting that his splendid offers for the lady would ultimately be accepted.

"Walk by my counsel," said De Lacy, to whom, in the fury of disappointment, he had unbosomed himself, "walk by my counsel, and she is thine, aye, without payment of one zecchin to this red tyrant, that thinks to make every man's neck his footstool!—Sup with me, good Sir Ilbert, and I will shew thee a bridge of safety over this gulf of storms.—"

Once confident of his knightly prey, the Baron hurried to strike, while the iron glowed, in another quarter.

He sought the tower allotted to Hugh Lupus, and presented himself suddenly before Matilda,

—"Staring, full ghastly, like a 'murdered' man."

The Lady's first words implied such an impression.—

"De Lacy!" she exclaimed, "or a spirit!"

"Himself," he answered, "that poor half of him, at least, left by the Devil and the Leech."

"Hast thou done a murder, Reginald?" said Matilda.

"No—" he replied, "but murder hath well nigh been done upon me."

"Aye," she resumed, "stabbed with bright eyes."

"They dig deep then," answered the Baron; "to draw blood by the goblet-full. Look!" and, throwing wide his cloak, he displayed more fully the ravages of sickness upon his else stalwart frame.

"It was bright steel, Lady; and stricken home, too;—laugh if thou wilt, but I have been stabbed scantily less than heart-deep by a woman's hand."

"Mother of Heaven!" cried Matilda, "but not by Constance de Mowbray!—ha?"

"By Heaven's Mother and my own, YES! Even by her! that pale-faced trembler! timid and shrinking as ye deem her. I had snatched the prize, by a shallow trick, from the yet shallower things who jested for her upon the forest-lea—"

"Justed!" interrupted Matilda.

"Why, heard ye not of that? Justed, I say. Let pass. The prize was mine. They chased me hotly, and in vain, until that accursed Stephen de Albemarle, riding as though a fiend

bore him, hallooed a voice of rescue, scarce five lance-lengths behind. Another minute and I had rid my saddle of the Dame, and, while they that aided me fled onward with *her*, I promise ye *this* hand had taught Stephen de Albemarle to thrust his busy fingers again betwixt me and mine? But, with the first breath of his lip, by St. Mary! my delicate one struggled like a sleuth-hound in a leash! shriek nor cry did she utter, but reared and writhed in my clutch, until, by evil chance, her own closed upon my dagger-hilt, and then——”

“ She stabbed thee!” exclaimed Matilda, her eye flashing admiration, “ why! *there* wrought the spirit of her race! *there* woke the De Mow-bray! But on—what next?”

“ Blood,” said De Lacy, “ blood—darkness—earth swimming, and sky reeling. I remember but the idle heaving up of my brand, as the hot Earl came thundering towards me; then all was black trance and dizzy stupor. When the cloud broke, I saw cavern walls, and a man, a Saxon, ghastly with vigils, seated near me, playing the leech. Three accursed days and nights of tossings, writhings, and drug-drinking crawled over me like twenty ages! and then my good saint took heart of ruth, and, as the godly

phrase it, I arose, and girded up my loins, and walked."

"As spirits walk," said Matilda, "to judge by thy white cheek. Why, thou art bloodless; and reft too, for ever, of the bright toy that tempted thee!"

"Not so, fair Damsel of the West," he replied. "Enough of blood yet boils at my heart, though it be driven awhile from cheek and brow; and *that*, ere long, Constance of the gory hand shall confess. Look! for a space she hath changed her keeper, but not *fate*, nor Reginald de Lacy. *Mine* she is, and mine she shall be. A Saxon wizard, my good leech and friend, hath looked heedfully to that. By *his* spells Constance de Mowbray vanished from the greedy eye of De Albemarle as quickly and as fairly as from mine! ha, ha, ha! I laugh to think that he is cozened! I laugh to know that she is nestled whither he cannot climb, were he a King to-night—whither I, and I alone, have the clue to follow."

"Get thee hence, then," said the Lady, "all blooming as thou art, and woo and win. But thou art cooled, De Lacy; sickness hath frozen love; or not thus hadst thou given the sweet bird time and chance to gather plume for flight."

"Oh, content ye," said the Baron, with a grisly chuckle, "content ye. She will tarry till I come. High and strong is the cage ; and if *she* fly to De Albemarle, or De Albemarle climb to *her*, the curse of the lightly-cheated fool be upon me ! "

"There are," said Matilda, "those who shall indeed curse thee if ever Stephen make Constance Queen of England. But now, Baron of Newark, what course holdest thou in this new and troubled world ? Art thou for King William or King Stephen ? ha ? "

De Lacy smiled grimly as before, while he replied, pointing to the cross upon his shoulder, "Dost thou speak of carnal vanities to the bearer of this symbol ? "

"Dost thou speak to a fool ? " returned the Lady, and then added, suddenly drawing back as the voice of Hugh Lupus sounded without,

"Make answer to mine uncle, for hither methinks he comes, yet shaking with the fever-fit of his wrath. Farewell, De Lacy, and remember, *my* heart, and will, and voice are as my kinsman's ; and thou and the Red Tyrant have broken bonds for ever. What ? shall not Newark follow Mans if——"

She ceased as the Earl of Chester strode heavily across the chamber, and then, adding

only the single word “Remember!” disappeared.

Hitherto De Lacy and Hugh Lupus had been of bitterly opposed factions; but the council-scene of that day had changed their position; made them brethren in persecution, and given them one common bond of new and exasperated feeling. Messengers were instantly dispatched for De Tunbridge and De Aldery; and the haughty discontented four met at supper with the promptitude of deep personal and political hatred. We confine ourselves, however, to results; merely stating that they departed that very night, suddenly and secretly, from Winchester; each pledging himself that, after a sweeping levy of his powers, he would march northward, and join the banner of De Mowbray.

CHAPTER III.

"Shift we the scene : The camp doth move."

Marmion.

"—Meanwhile, as they talked, behold, and lo ! there came a dwarf from the city of Camelot."—

Morte d'Arthur.

HITHERTO the unities of time and place have been almost classically unbroken in our drama. We must now take license with both ; and, bidding a long adieu to the White City, premise the lapse of some weeks between the close of our last chapter and the opening of this.

We change the scene, too, from the sylvan slopes and woody glades of Hampshire, to the savage wilds and iron-bound shores of Durham and Northumberland.

In these provinces the flame of rebellion had now every where broken out, and, from the banks of the Tees and Tyne to those of Tweed and Teviot, not a fortress, or strong-hold of note, remained to King William, except Ber-

nard Castle and Morpeth, which were stoutly defended by Guido Baliol and Roger de Merley, both powerful Barons, and violently opposed to "the haughty Northumberland." We have already intimated that the towers of Monkchester (Newcastle) had been seized, immediately after De Waleric's murder, by a detachment of the Rebels. They were now strongly garrisoned for De Albemarle, who, in fact, throwing away the scabbard with his assumed minstrelship, had proclaimed himself King of England, and established his court within those very walls.

About nine miles to the eastward, his potent friend De Mowbray lifted the banner of "King Stephen," upon the castellated Priory of Tynemouth, and resided there with little less of state than the new Monarch himself; while the remote stations of Alnwick, Dunstanborough, and Bamborough, given to the safe-keeping of tried friends, with stout garrisons, appeared tolerably secure from any attempt King William could make against them. The whole *Northern* power of the insurgent Earls was, indeed, now afoot; and such of their numbers as were not drawn within castle walls, or quartered in neighbouring towns and villages, encamped along the banks of the rivers, ready at an instant's warn-

ing to coalesce and march upon a given point. In the mean time, their Southern allies, the Earl of Chester, De Tunbridge, and De Lacy, acting upon less organised plans, taken by surprise, and having levies to raise in, and conduct through, districts where the power and authority of William were yet recognised, had a more tedious and dilatory game to play. Assurances, however, reached De Mowbray that they were, at length, *en route*, and in such numbers as would enable the combined powers to fight even a pitched battle with Rufus.

On the other hand, that fiery Monarch, nothing doubting, and nothing fearing, threw himself with a fierce alacrity from his throne into the war saddle ; and, like the “blazing Hyperion” of Keats, threatened speedily to

“—— stretch a terrible right arm
Over the troubled confines of his realm.”

Flambard, with the power of Regent over the south, remained at Winchester. All the great vassals of the crown, obeying the summons to which their tenures subjected them, joined the royal standard in full force at Tamworth ; and, from thence, set out in two hosts to meet or surprise the Rebels. One of these divisions, under Rufus himself, with the Constable De

Miles, and the prime chivalry of the Royalists, marched direct upon York ; that city, with its powerful castle, being the first of De Mowbray's strengths which lay in the route northward. The other forces, led by Montgomery, glanced to the westward, with a view, not only of assuring the Northern Welsh Marches, but of intercepting, if possible, the yet divided legions of Earl Lupus and De Tunbridge. The King succeeded with little delay, in *his* object, York being surrendered upon the second summons ; but the speed and vigilance of the Marshal were eluded by the Earl of Chester and Sir Ilbert, who, effecting their junction, hurried northward to the main body, and at the moment of our narrative being resumed, were within little more than two days' march of the Tyne. Let us not forget to add, that the Damoiselle Matilda was in their company, nothing loth ; and that not a *preux chevalier* of them all shewed greater enthusiasm in the cause, or more indifference to fatigue and danger.

So much for the high and mighty of our personages. But where was the gentle Raymond ? where the lovely Constance ? where the unlovely Dwarf ? and where the jolly Knight of the Broken Lance, with his mad-cap Squire ? As to

the three first, we venture to reply in the words of the Author of “Henry, Earl of Moreland :”

“ AUTHOR. While all imaginable care is taking for the recovery of these poor people, we beg leave to return

“ FRIEND. Ah, plague upon your ‘*return!*’ here you have raised my curiosity to the highest, and distressed me in the extreme, as to these unhappy persons, and, in the instant, you fly off from the satisfaction expected. But I presume you are *upon honour*; you are intrusted with secrets, and

“ AUTHOR. Sir, you never were more mistaken. I know nothing at all of these people’s affairs, but as soon as they are able *they shall speak for themselves.*”

For the present, then, this is all that we undertake respecting Raymond and Constance; and as for the poor Dwarf, who *cannot* speak for himself, we will endeavour that in due time, others may speak for him.

The good knight, Alberic du Coci, however, we will immediately set before all eyes. The first mover in the great military game about to be played, he had hurried northward, at the King’s beck, to recover by a *coup-de-main* the important fortress of Newcastle. He essayed this by

forced marches and very inefficient numbers ; expecting, no doubt, according to his ordinary sanguine wont, to fall like a thunderbolt upon the surprised garrison. He was very greatly mistaken : the stout Tynedale and Stanhope men had not so been instructed in cornage and castle-guard ; to say nothing of the presence of De Albemarle himself, who knew as well how to defend a Gundulf keep,* ninety feet high, as any man in France or Britain. Du Coci lost nearly a third of his power in an assault, and by a subsequent sally of the garrison ; and, although reinforced in some measure by scattered royalists, at feud with De Mowbray, he was fain to change the siege into what could scarcely be called a blockade—but rather, a mere *mal-roisin* matter of annoyance and occasion-watching. Retiring some two or three miles eastward, the discomfited Knight took up a strong position upon the northern bank of the Tyne, near what is now called Carville House, the ancient Roman Segedunean ; the first of the stations, if antiquarians say true, where, *per lineam valli*, the fourth cohort of the Largi was quartered. Here, with the river protecting one flank, and a

* So called from Gundulf, Bishop of Rochester, an eminent architect of the reigns of William I. and II.

tolerably deep ditch, and hastily constructed wall, fencing the other, he pitched his tents and huts for the present, and awaited, with stout heart, whatever fortune might have in store—the aid of friends or the attacks of enemies.

Here, therefore, we rejoin our old acquaintance, and resume.

It was night—dark, with vast clouds hurrying over the heavens, and, notwithstanding the season, chill, and bleak, and showery. A cutting blast, laden with the mist popularly known in that blessed climate by the term “sea-fret,” whistled keenly through the encampment, and found ingress by a thousand crannies and loopholes of the ill-constructed hovels. It blew thus keenly from that bitter quarter, whose very breezes, upon the coast we speak of, are the peculiar dread of all things breathing the breath of life, and recall to every shivering invalid the words of Job, “why should a man fill his belly with the *east-wind?*”—a text, by the way, proving the universality of the infliction, from the shores of the German Ocean to those of the Sea of Galilee, or whatever waters rolled nearest the land of Uz.

Alone in his miserable hut, the remnant of a tower of the olden days, when the world had one

mistress, sat the Knight of the Broken Lance. He wore his armour and his riding cloak ; his hands alone were unmailed, and, with a chilly gesture, he spread them to a little fire casting a stinted cheerfulness in one angle, and the fuel of which *might*, for ought we know, be the infant produce of a “*Walls-end seam.*” Upon a huge chest, at once the armoury, wardrobe, and treasury of the Knight, and the lid of which did further duty as a table, there appeared, on one side, and within instant grasp, his sword and mallet of arms ;—on the other, a small flaggon, and a little bread, marvellously coarse and black. He had finished his lenten meal, and, after a few strides across the narrow den, stretched himself upon a horse-rug by the glimmering hearth—gazed with a sleepy eye upon the red phantasma of its embers, armed monsters, and grotesque nothings—listened with a dull ear to the wanderer’s steps without ; and, slowly dropping his head against the chest, fell into a light sleep—the light sleep of the soldier, willing and anxious to be wakeful. It was broken by a touch and a voice ; and, starting up, he beheld Nicholas de L’Epée, who, with streaming brow and muddled vestments, propping his back against the wall, and seizing the bread with one hand

and the flaggon with the other, looked the express image of fatigue, and the very emblem of thirst and hunger. He set down the too quickly emptied vessel with a long-drawn sigh, partly for his own exhaustion, and partly for that of the grateful beverage ; dropped heavily upon the chest beside Sir Alberic, and exclaimed,

“ By my faith, Sir Knight, I am well nigh breathless and strengthless ; and ye lie there looking like King Arthur in the olden tale, when he laid him down by a fountain side, and there, as the minstrel saith, ‘ fell into great thoughts.’ ”

“ And thou,” replied his master, “ art like the ‘ questing beast’ that he saw come to the fountain and drink, and the sound of whose guzzling, *as the minstrel saith*, ‘ was like unto the questing on of thirty couple of hounds.’ Tell me, O thou strange beast ! what hast thou been doing ? ”

“ Pounding the Tyne in a mortar, and catching the east-wind in a net,” said Nicholas ; “ or doing that which is as bootless, scouring these bleak wilds, far and near, with soaked boots and a dry gullet for my pains.”

“ Hast thou been east and west ? ” inquired

the Knight, “within eye-glance and ear-shot of both castles?”

“Of both, with a murrain to them!” replied De L’Epée. “Ye have pitched tent here with a notably discreet eye to *that* service. We lie, methinks, betwixt the Devil’s horns and the jaws of the deep sea; midway, that is, betwixt black Tynemouth and grim Newcastle. But, thanks to the rushing stream on *one* hand, and the roaring ocean on the *other*, and, ever and anon, black clouds over both, I have had luck to pass and repass without scathe or espial.”

“Why, God helps the brave man and the fool,” said Du Coci; “what sawest thou, gentle Nicholas?”

“A drove of fat beeves,” said Nicholas, “entering the North barbican of the New Castle; some eighteen or a score, it may be—think of *that*, Sir Alberic! a score, and fat ones! ah, pitiful Virgin! if mine eyes, at the beholding thereof, wept not tears as fast and as hot as ever a roasting chine its heavenly gravy drops, set me to yoke foxes and milk he-goats for a thousand years! Oh, that I had had but twenty of our lean-jawed villains yonder, whose ribs are like to rub holes in their gambesons ere long! we would have fought for the brave kine as never starved

dogs fought for a bone ! · But, let pass, and take heart of grace, good Sir Alberic ; we shall either be speedily helped in this world, or out of it into a better ; for I heard the gateward of Newcastle swear lustily to one of the drivers, how that word had come suddenly to King Stephen of a great Host marching fast hither ; but whether King William to fight, or the Earl of Chester to friend, the Lord knew and not they—one or t'other, certes."

" Or both," replied the Knight, " as may well chance ; what more didst thou espy ?"

" The nakedness of the land, good master mine ; seeing no more of the swine's flesh, and ale, and other purveyance yon Saxon villain promised ye, than I see of St. Anthony and his sow, in this sty of the empty trough, where we are all like to die for lack of vivers, if yonder Earl-King, indeed, come not out speedily with his full-fed merry-men, as strong as their own fat beeves, and charitably cut all the throats that have nothing left to go down them."

" A curse upon that treacherous villain of a Saxon !" cried the Knight, " talk of gaining over *his* lying race ? why they will swear succour to ye to-night, and shoot a thousand shafts for De Albemarle to-morrow."

"Aye," replied Nicholas, "they are all hag-gards of a like feather. But, it is said, the pork-fed rascals will shoot shaft and draw knife for whomsoever the great WOLFSIC-SE-BLACA biddeth them."

"The great Devil!" exclaimed the disappointed commander; "but how call ye your great sick wolf of a Saxon?"

"Wolfsic-se-Blaca," repeated Nicholas; "or, if ye be deaf of your Saxon ear, Wolfsic *the Pale*—pale he is, and great he is, after a fashion—a great rebel—a great knave—a great one-legged king of cripples, who keeps his court hard by here, in some odd hole of the wild sea-rocks. Men say that he can do whatsoever he lists with man, woman, and child of the fallen race; and hath tickled more Normans with sharp iron feathers than ever a bush-fighter of them all. Ever at morning he prays for a quick-spreading pestilence in all our members; and, at eve, that Heaven may send us perpetual dearth, with horrid memory of fat harvests. Marry, now, if ye would but swear to this Gog-Magog of the Saxons, that King William is minded to deal graciously with them, so that they be forward to do him good service in this day of need——"

“ Why,” interrupted his lord, “ it is well said, and *thou* shalt be hostage with them for the tender mercies of the King. But what aileth thee on a sudden, Squire Fool? Seest thou already, with those staring apprehensive eyes, the Gog-Magog of the Saxons ready to scoop them out of their sockets, ha?”

“ No,” replied the son of Jodesac, looking strangely towards the ruined entrance, over which a fold of canvass was loosely drawn, and edging slowly towards the opposite corner, “ if I were now to be afeard, it would be of a thing of far other inches—by Mary-mother, I——”

He stopped, passed his hand across his forehead, and, drawing himself wildly up, shut his eyes close, as one who strives to shake off a morbid or nervous phantasy. Sir Alberic, now also rising, saw that he was actually pale with emotion, and said, with a kindly earnestness—

“ Why, gentle Nicholas, how fares it with thee?” then, drawing him on to the chest, “ sit—sit, rest and be of cheer. What, man! this comes of thine over-zealous watchings and wanderings, thy daily toiling at ditch and rampart, and nightly vigils and espials—they have out-worn thee. But, look, *mine* hath been the error, and I will amend it. Rest thee, good youth, and take food and wine, and——”

"For God's love," said Nicholas, "make me not too much ashamed of this puling green-girlishness ; but, as I live and breathe, it will not yet away from me that I have this night been elfin-chased from the sea-rocks hither, over the bents and the wild moor!"

"Elfin-chased ! thou marvellous gander !" cried Du Coci, "eat, drink, and sleep, I say ; and have done with this cackling silliness!"

"Nay—" rejoined the Squire, "but methought, even now, as this fool's qualm came over me, that the small, fearful visage glared upon me from the entrance curtain!—"

"Hold thy peace, good goose ! hold thy peace," said the Knight, laughing, "unless thou hast brain enough left to tell me what manner of eldritch wild-fowl, what strange spirit in the shape of a swine-keeper's ban-dog, or what frightfully-shaken bull-rush, hath given thy five wits such a buffet on the cracked side ?"

"Ye spake of *wine*—" said the Squire, stretching himself faintly and uneasily by the hearth ; and, after a heavy pull at the replenished flaggon, adding, "Dost thou remember, Sir Alberic, that monstrous mushroom, hight Elfin Puckfist, that waited heretofore upon De Albermarle, in Hampshire-woods ? that grim babe

that the Devil necklaced with knot-grass* in the cradle! the same who, I have told ye, was left, plying leech-craft, when that infernal buffet from an unseen fist laid me helpless by the side of the now-vanished Raymond?"

"Grammercy, sensible one!" exclaimed the Knight, "chased by *that* beagle? why, thou shouldst have chased the chaser, remembering that the poor Dwarf vanished also upon that busy night; and, if De Albemarle speak sooth, hath never been seen since. There is hope that the poor imp hath broken cage, and, had he a tongue betwixt those hideous jaws of his, might tell into whose clutches our gallant Raymond hath fallen. Oh, thou shouldst tush!" he added, interrupting himself,—"the disease of folly is more catching than the drife. Let us to rest, with this dreary lullaby of whistling wind; and pray well that thy dreams be neither of dwarf nor devil."

Both Knight and Squire then stretched themselves sociably under their riding cloaks, and the latter; greatly exhausted, was soon buried in profound slumber. Again the night-wind sang dreamily in Dn Coci's ear; again the dying embers came

* Knot-grass was in that day supposed to prevent the growth of children or animals.

in tremulous and prolonged glimmerings upon his eye; and again the calm blessing of repose descended upon the rough pallet of the soldier.

But it was not destined for endurance.

Awakening once more with a start, it seemed to him as if a cold finger had been just then pressed upon his brow. He looked, and listened. All was silent, and there lay the heavily-sleeping Nicholas. But, upon turning round, a strange low form presented itself, standing midway between him and the entrance.

“ Mary-mother !” he ejaculated, rubbing his eyes, and gazing steadfastly upon the apparition, “ am I, too, a driveller or a dreamer ? Why, what art thou ? ”

The object drew slowly nearer ; and the Knight, throwing a few dried leaves and twigs upon the embers, saw, by the short-lived blaze, that his visitor was none other than Elfin Puck-fist. There, at least, stood all that remained of the poor Dwarf, upon whom, always sufficiently lean, famine seemed to have been doing a superrogatory work of attenuation, until his appearance suggested that of a man’s head, fixed, by artificial mechanism, upon the skeleton of a child.

"*Thou!*" said Du Coci, "whence? and wherefore?"

The creature raised a finger, as if to bespeak attention; and then, pointing to the entrance, motioned to beckon him forth.

"Thou art *dumb?*" said the Host.

The visiter threw his head backward, and then slowly declined it forward upon his breast; and immediately repeated the gesture of summons.

"Softly—I pray you. Where is thy lord, the sometime Minstrel? Nay, gentle Puckfist, thy head-shakes and hand-wavings serve not the present turn. Ye are a subtle nation, ye silent small men; and have that, in the place of bulk and wisdom, which ofttimes gives ye the forehand of better natures and statures both. What wouldest thou, I say, and whither?"

The Dwarf again shook his disproportioned head, and impatiently repeated the beckoning sign.

"Why," said Du Coci, in the same low tones he had employed throughout, in order that the sleeping Nicholas might not awake to fresh terrors, "thou art the first starved wren that ever thought to play the decoy-duck with a belted

knight. Get hence, mandrake ! thou canst not lead Alberic du Coci into the traps or springes of De Albemarle."

At these words, the summoner struck vehemently upon his bosom, and raised his hands to heaven, with the air of one who makes a solemn adjuration. He then stretched his shrivelled forefinger rapidly to every point of the compass in succession, to the roof and to the floor ; shook his matted elf-locks, folded his lean arms, and looked sorrowfully down.

It was an enigma ; but one, however, which Du Coci thought he could solve ; understanding the Dwarf to swear by it that he knew nothing of his quondam lord ; not even whether dead or alive.

" Well," he resumed, " and Raymond of the Heart of Steel ? ha ? tell me of him ?"

Puckfist started at the name ; grasped the arm of his questioner ; nodded rapidly several times ; and pointed to the entrance as before.

Sir Alberic lighted a small lamp that stood near—and drawing his guest close, held it full in his wrinkled front, as if to read what truth or treachery the strange volume revealed. But the suspected one met the scrutiny with melancholy firmness ; and resumed the pantomimic lan-

guage of his infirmity. He pointed to the hand with which Du Coci still detained him ; then to the edge of the Knight's dagger ; and, lastly, to his own throat ; indicating, by a transverse gesture upon it, the action of cutting that vital region across.

Relaxing his hold, Sir Alberic answered the Pigmy in his own way. He nodded with a grim significance ; drew out the poniard, and shook it alternately towards heaven, and in the face of his guest. Then replaced it, and taking up his sword and mallet, pointed, in his turn, to the ruined entrance.

It remained only to be understood whether De L'Epée, or, indeed, any human being, was to accompany them ; but the Dwarf peremptorily intimated “No.” Without disputing the point, Du Coci extinguished the lamp, drew his cloak around him, and followed his singular guide out of the encampment ; leaving the weary Nicholas mercifully to his slumbers, and to his own puzzling conjectures upon awaking from them.

CHAPTER IV.

"Childe Roland to the dark tower came."

Ballad in King Lear.

It was a miserable night. The raw and biting east wind drifted full in their exposed fronts, now laden with the drizzling sea-fret, and now with heavier showers poured from the still ascending masses of black cloud that came rolling over the German Deep; and through which, at dreary intervals, the moon, a wan, dull crescent, shed a spectral and infrequent light.

The Dwarf led direct to the river's brink, and a boat (one of the few Sir Alberic had seized for the security of his position) bore them across the stream. They passed with little labour of rowing, for the tide was running strongly out, augmented by heavy rains through the previous days; and Puckfist, pilot upon the river, as guide upon the shore, suffered their little vessel to drift with it a considerable way to seaward. Their landing-place at length was Jarrow Point, so called from its vicinity to the conventual

house of Jarrow, the ancient Gwyrwy, then just rebuilt, after a destructive share in the avenging ravages of the first William.

Leaving the river at their back, and plunging for a mile through dismal swamps, our adventurers passed the dark and silent towers of the monastery and church, whose yet visible ruins the antiquarian traveller still associates with the venerable name of Bede.

With desperate strides did our poor Mannikin essay to keep in advance of the stalwart Du Coci, as, glancing from the southern direction they had assumed, they, once more, and with better footing, trudged eastward towards the sea, the roar of which came every minute louder and louder upon the blast. At length their further course appeared stayed by the wild high beach cliffs, which, with little interruption, stretch for some miles southward from Tynemouth; and the vast and stormy expanse of the German ocean lay full before them.

Almost the whole of that bleak north-eastern coast, from the Tees to the Alne and Coquet, may be considered as “the abomination of desolation” to mariners; but nowhere is it more wild, and dangerously broken, than at the spot to which we have conducted Sir Alberic and the

reader. The shore is in the highest degree savage and terrible. Its rocks, shattered by a thousand storms, have parted, from age to age, with vast fragments that stand in every variety of grotesque form and combination ; pillars, and tombs, and towers ; ramparts, and huge bridges, and triumphal arches, through the black-green hollows of which the billows roar and dash as if exulting in the fresh paths they have worn and worked out for themselves in their playful fury. There is one enormous craggy mass, riven from the parent beach by that almost omnipotent ocean which it once seemed to defy, and now standing detached about a hundred yards, called (*præcipue et præ aliis*) Marston Rock. It is perforated as we have just described, and he who, during a stormy sunset, has sate within the mighty archway, and looked upon the foam-tipt billows, coursing faster, louder, and nearer to his craggy throne, while darker and darker clouds gathered over the heavens, and nothing of life was heard but the petrel's cry, and the sea-mew's shriek, and the clang of the cormorant's wing ; nor seen, unless the flitting forms of these, and perhaps a solitary boat, half-hid in mist, while toiling to make the port ere night ; he who has thus sat, has witnessed a sublime

spectacle, to which the gaze of life-long dwellers in plains and vallies can boast no parallel, and of which their imagination can realize no image.*

But, to resume our narrative,

'Sir Alberic and his colossal friend, while the wind that roared along the *bents* flapped their wet garments heavily around them, lingered upon the dizzy heights only for the help and comfort of the next sickly moon-gleam; and then, by a most perilous zigzag, descended slowly to the chaos of the shattered beach. It swept around a little bay, guarded, and savagely adorned, by the fragments we have described; and terminated upon the north by the prime Limestone mass, Marston Rock; not then torn from the parent cliff, and with an opening no larger than would admit the upright body of a

* This scene of craggy magnificence lies about a mile or two from the port of Shields, and five or six from the rival harbour of Sunderland. Nature, in her beauty or her grandeur, is not generally worshipped with extreme bigotry by the trading in-dwellers of sea-ports; but this is one of the few and favoured shrines to which repair can easily be made by the more idle or imaginative of the busy and flourishing towns just named. "A holiday sailing-boat," says the lamented Surtees of Mainsforth, "has sometimes passed the yawning aperture of Marston with more happy success than the adventurous Cockneys of the Anti-jacobin.

" Shoot we the bridge!" the venturous boatmen cry;
" Shoot we the bridge!" the exulting fare reply."

man. Doubtless this, for the tide was far out, they came upon another and a larger bay, with clearer, broader sands, sweeping round to the river-mouth, where a few paltry *sheals*, marked the site of what *was to be* the fifth Port in the first of maritime kingdoms. A heavy sea was breaking upon Tyne bar, and the surf running furiously over long black reefs that stretch beyond; threatening, and, too often, dealing destruction to the embayed mariner who hears the lee-breakers boil and thunder along their dreadful ridges.

Northward, dim looming through the night-shades, the vast monastery of Tynemouth appeared in lonely majesty; fragments of rock, blacker than the black ocean, heaped and scattered, like the *debris* of an earthquake, around the storm-rent base of the huge promontory upon which it stood; and along which its few but graceful ruins are now

“ Bared to the set-winds sweep ”

—Of, the opposing horn of the bay, the modern Marston, the whole craggy line was broken by cavern-mouths, the grotesque inlets to those

“ —— worn and wild receptacles
Worked by the storms, yet worked as it were planned
In hollow halls with sparry roofs and cells ; ”

and through which, at high tide, the surges poured and broke with tremendous fury.

Into one of these, and one with the least inviting aspect, Elfin Puckfist guided the Knight of the Broken Lance. The aperture which readily admitted the Dwarf, required his companion to stoop low and heedfully ; and it was not till he had crawled upon hands and knees for a considerable way, now up, now down ; now right, now left ; and sometimes submitting even to a snake-like movement, prone on the sandy granite, that the dark windings expanded, and gave him freer access to the secret depths or heights he was to explore. Toiling upward by notches and projections that painfully did the office of stairs, they emerged at last into a cavern, dimly lighted by a rift, or fissure, on one side, that admitted a few broken beams of the moon. Elfin then pressed the hand of Du Coci admonishingly, and preserved, himself, that almost unbreathing stillness which implies the caution of a fearful listener. Suddenly his grasp relaxed ; a grating sound was heard ; a dim red light, as from a lamp or torch, spread along the cavern ; and the Knight perceived that a piece of the living rock, grooved and hinged with a strange skill, had yielded to the push of

the Dwarf's hand, showing the entrance to some wild retreat, thus jealously secured by "cunning workmen," from almost every chance of human discovery.

There was no sound or sight of life, and they entered; the Dwarf betraying (or affecting, for the Knight knew not which) as much surprise at their facility of entrance, as the latter at the strangeness of all around him.

The second cavern, for it was merely such, seemed, however, larger than the first, and hollowed with more of artifice into something resembling the abode of man. There were also some habitable tokens, however rude, disposed, or rather, scattered around. "What *seemed* a table, the *likeness* of an iron lamp had on," together with a knife, a trencher, and a drinking vessel. A few dim embers showed that a fire had been recently burning, and near it was a low pallet, sad substitute, perhaps, both for bed and chair. At the extremity of this drear apartment, the Dwarf pushed with his full strength, as before, and a similar inlet appeared, winding yet deeper into the rock. Again Puck-fist motioned caution and silence; and again Du Coci followed him, until the narrow passage ended in a sort of caverned hall, or chamber,

for it was impossible to judge which, so spacious did it appear by the dull lamp carried by the Dwarf, and which scarcely threw even a glimmer upon the opposing walls. They passed through without stopping to examine; but Du Coci's eye rested for an instant upon more than one ghastly object, and he knew not, in his bewilderment and awe, whether they were the spirits or the skeletons of the dead that stood in hideous niches above, or lay upon massive slabs below, and seemed to turn their fleshless heads after him as he passed.

Puckfist now set down the lamp, and they traversed in darkness another and a longer passage through this labyrinthine chain of caverns. The gloomy corridor wound on as if conducting to the "chambers of perpetual night;" but ended in a kind of gallery, which, like the upper cloisters of an abbey chancel, threaded the vast walls; and, by shapeless apertures, looked down, on every side, into a deep sad vault below. There, a voice murmured, and a light gleamed; but the sounds were not of life, nor the beams of comfort; and both seemed strangled by the misty depth and murkiness from whence they issued. Du Coci looked painfully through one of the jagged loop-holes that commanded the

strange scene, and he saw that it was one of extreme misery; extreme, for there were its worst elements; sorrow and penury, and sin, and age, and wretchedness, and approaching death.

The only inmates of that fearful chamber were two women; both worn by age, and—if ever human lineaments told truth—by fierce and long enduring passion. But one was at that instant dying, as her sharpened and livid features plainly told; and the other seemed watching gloomily by the death-bed which every other human being had deserted. Sometimes she pressed her skinny hand upon the bosom of the sufferer; sometimes listened to catch the suspended, or scarcely-drawn breath; and sometimes bent over her ghastly face to survey it by the dull beam of a lamp hung near the pallet head, and which, as the oil was nearly consumed, shed lustre

"For a charnel-dungeon fitter."

It was while the flame leapt up with one of its presaging flashes, and drew the glance of her who watched, that Sir Alberic marked how fearful was the expression of a countenance in which time and sorrow had subdued nothing

but gentleness and mercy ; in which every line spoke of ills sullenly endured, or wrongs savagely avenged. Twice she started from her low seat, and drawing aside the coarse black arras, which looked the very mockery of hangings, listened eagerly, as if for the approach of one who came not ; then returned to her charge, to watch the convulsions which, in delirious slumber, shot at intervals along the brow. More than once, when these were violent, she seemed to expect the parting struggle ; but the reluctant principle of life was yet stronger than she deemed it.

“ Loath—loath—loath !” she muttered ; “ the spirit is loath to part. Thou ! ” apostrophizing the lamp as it dimmed and flickered, “ thou wilt expire first, and evil things will gather around me, and tear the limbs of the dead ;—of the dead that hath died in darkness !—I must replenish thee.”

And as she busied herself with the cresset, that soon emitted a brighter and steadier flame, her dark mutterings went on,—

“ Aye ! blaze—blaze—a few drops of filthy oil, and thou art all life and youth again ; but,” turning to the death-couch, “ no oil for the lamp of life—no oil for the lamp of life ! What say the priests to that ? ha ?”

She then turned with stretched arms to the sufferer, whose stupor-fit seemed broken by a fiercer convulsion ; the corpse-like frame half-raised itself from the bed, and the glazed eyes lit up, as they opened, with a terrifying brilliance. It seemed as if they followed a Phantom through the thick gloom of the caverns ; and her voice, as she suddenly spoke, had the hollowness of a sepulchral echo,

“ O thou dread Form ! ” she exclaimed, “ thou that wert once so dear, and art so terrible ! why dost thou haunt me ? whither dost thou beckon ? ”

“ Thy soul is dark, sister,” said her companion ; “ it is dark and wandering ; and thine eyes look but upon the things of the loaded heart and the weary brain. What seest thou ? ”

“ Look ! ” said the patient, still gazing into the vacant gloom, and pointing with her skeleton hand, “ seest thou nothing ? ”

“ I see nothing,” replied the nurse, wiping the clammy brow of her charge, “ nothing but thee in thy sick anguish, and these dim caves, and the blackness of their everlasting shadows.”

“ I see a Spirit ! ” exclaimed the other, wildly, “ a Spirit beckoning with a cloudy hand ! It is my Sigeric ! my love ! my lord ! my warrior ! and my husband ! oh look, Wynfreda !

look ! dim as the morning mist are his fixed eyes—calm as the frozen stream is his broad brow !”

“ Hush thee, afflicted one ! ” said the Attendant ; “ hush, and be still. We are alone.”

“ Alone with him ! ” raved the dying woman ; “ and he comes near ! nearer ! oh, sister of the dead ! thou whom he loved in life, look ! look how his pale lips smile ! ”

“ A fiend abuses thee ! ” cried the other crone, straining her gaze in the direction pointed, and looking more than half-expectant of the vision she denied ; “ A fiend abuses thee, Adalieve. Were it my brother from his bloody grave, were it Sigeric with his festering wounds, I should behold him fairly as thou ! he would not shun the eyes of his sole sister—of her to whom revenge for his slaughter were as a thousand years of joy and triumph. It is a demon, and not Sigeric ! if it were *he*, no mist were in the eye, no calm upon the brow, no smile upon the lip ! terror would be around him as a robe, and vengeance as a girdle of fire ! his frown would be as the blackness of the storm, and his gaze as the red flashing of its bolts, when they rend the oak above, and shatter the rock beneath ! his hand would grasp a broken and a

gory sword ; and, if he uttered forth a voice, 'twould be for Vengeance, Vengeance on his Norman butchers !'

" 'Twas so till now---ever till now," muttered the Sick ; "so have I seen him when sleep came not at midnight, after long brooding o'er the past ; or when it fled at the voice of the rushing storm, and my awakening eyes beheld him pacing, dark and terrible, by my couch ! so have I seen him in my noon-tide path, when the shrill east blew fog and spray along the beach ; the helm upon his brow, the gory mail upon his limbs, the dripping and shivered steel in his fleshless grasp ! Thus, too, hath thy dark brother, Wolfsic-se-Blaca, he, '*the Avenger*,' seen him by wood and wold, upon the midnight heath, and by the fall of torrents, in huts and caves, in halls and chambers, when other eyes were blinded, even as thine are now, and no ear but his drank in the cry for blood ! so have we seen him in these caves of vengeance, ere we have done the deeds that——oh, God ! "

She ceased, and with a gesture of horror, and clasped arms, shrank as if her whole frame suffered collapse by a wrench of mortal agony ; then, sinking slow and shudderingly upon her pillow, and fixing a dreadful look upon Wynfreda, she added, distractedly,

"Speak comfort to me, O sister of Sigeric ! of him for whom we have done these slaughters—tell me that in the grave there is peace ! that there is no ear above for the cry of blood ! tell me that priests lie—that there is no Heaven or Hell—oh, tell me that there is no God ! no God ! no God !"

She, to whom this horrible adjuration was addressed, shrank not, nor shuddered ; but her eye dilated, and her brow grew white as she made answer,

"Question thy haunting spirit, if such be. Adjure him by all powers—by Christ and Woden—by Zernebock and by Mary-mother !"

"I see him not," said the wretched being, gazing languidly in her exhaustion ; "he is gone from my sick couch ; I see him not."

"Art thou awake ?" said the listener, somewhat harshly.

"Once more," replied Adaleve, "for I have slept, and my dreams were not as the dreams of other hours. I saw my Sigeric, as I have seen him oft ; even as thou hast painted him, in wrath and terror ! even as Se-Blaca sees him when the terrible hour is upon his soul, and when avenging deeds are to be done in the caverned dungeons beneath us !"

She paused a few moments, and then resumed,

“ It was night, methought, upon a blasted heath, and the storm-rack swept across the stormy heavens. My Sigeric stood upon the waste, tossing his cloudy arms on high. Around him were the blood-stained altars of other days ; and, dim above, but vast and terrible, the gods of the ancient faith, bending over the grey stones of their power. Then I saw shadowy things (*one* like to thee, Wynfreda ; *one* like thy brother Se-Blaca,) dragging two victims, a maiden and a youth, up to the loftiest and the bloodiest shrine. I saw them bound and bared to the keen knife grasped in the red hand of Sigeric ; but, as the sacrificial steel rose for the blow, away, away in whirlwind and in cloud rolled shrines and Gods, victims and shadows ! Then there was silence, and I heard a voice (mighty as the mixed roar of the four winds !) cry ‘ Vengeance is mine ; *I* will repay ! ’ and when I looked again, how changed was my Sigeric ! how changed from the armed Terror of other visions—the frowning and the terrible ! I tell thee, sister, his brow was calm ; mercy and gentleness were in his eye ; the wounds of the fierce De Mowbray’s lance streamed no more ; the mail of the haughty warrior was gone, and in its stead were garments of shining

white. The sword, the spear, the axe, gleamed not in his wan hand ; but in its unblooded grasp a palm-branch waved. He spoke, and oh, how changed was his dread voice ! its thunder-tones of wrath were hushed as a spent storm ; solemn and sweet and sad were its new accents ; and, for the once fierce cry of ‘vengeance ! vengeance !’ I heard but the unwonted words—‘*Forgive, and spare !*’ ”

“ Sick dreamer !” exclaimed the stern Wynfreda, rising impatiently, “it is the feebleness of thy parting spirit that palters with thee thus. The words of lying priests, long scoffed at and defied, come back upon thee in thy helplessness, as carrion things prey upon the hunter, when his scared steed flings him from the rock, and the strength of his limbs is gone. I will arouse thee, Adaleve ! tell me, daughter of Saxon Eadmer—of that brave Thane, whose castle the fierce Normans gave to sword and flame, sparing not maid or matron—old man or babe !—Tell me, wife of Northumbria’s Earl ; widow of the mighty Sigeric, whose blood the Norman Mowbray poured savagely upon the turf—whose towers of Bamborough are even now the murderer’s high place of pride and tyranny ; whose captive sons and kinsmen have perished in its

deep cells and dungeons ;—tell me, Sister of that wretched one who married with the Norman butcher, De Mandeville of Essex, and fell the victim of his murderous jealousy ;—tell me, I say, whom wouldst thou ‘*forgive and spare?*’—Know, thou degenerate trembler in Death’s grasp ! the victims *now* within our clutch, whom thou wouldst *spare* for a sick dream, will be the dearest offering to the shade of slaughtered Sigeric that ever yet hath fallen to our great vengeance ! until De Mowbray’s self die by Se Blaca’s hand ! ‘*forgive and spare?*’ Hath my devoted brother for *this* baptized him in the blood of Normans with the dread name ‘AVENGER?’ hath he for *this* groaned out long years in Norman dungeons ? for *this* watched, toiled, and bled, and shot a thousand shafts when other hands were folded in slumber ? that, in the hour of almost final triumph, *Thou* shouldst ‘*forgive and spare?*’ No, by Thor and Seater ! *forgive* thou mayst, but *spare* thou shalt not ! I go to summon Wolfsic by the kindled beacon ; if his steps be not afar off, he shall speed hither while thou art yet in life, and plead with thee for the great work of vengeance which thou wouldst mar and botch in bed-rid impotence.”

“Tarry,” said the dying Matron, feebly,

"tarry, sister, a little space—lest my spirit depart, and there be none to close these wretched eyes. Oh, tarry but the coming of the Leech!"

"Even for his coming, I go," replied the stern one. "He is Priest as well as Leech, and will prate to thee after the fashion of his tribe, after the sick quailing of thine own bosom. He will preach to thee of mercy — and"—she paused, and listened, for a movement of Du Coci's struck his sword against the rock; then added, when the silence was again unbroken, "—No. They come not. They will not come. An hour had sufficed, and Edric hath trebled that. What cares the Norman Leech for the dying Saxon? Tynemouth, too, is Castle now, as well as Convent; and Edric is slain or captive; no word of leechcraft passed to the proud Abbot."

She put a cup of some dark liquid to the lips of Adaleve, and merely adding "Peace, and be still;" and placing several large keys, as if for concealment, in a nook of the rock, drew her mantle around her, and quitted the wretched chamber.

It flashed instantly upon Sir Alberic, that one of the intended victims alluded to in the conversation he had thus overheard, was, no doubt,

his poor friend Raymond ; and, drawing a long breath, he swore internally to bury himself alive in those caverns of horror, rather than fail to extricate him. There appeared no sign of living creature remaining, except the dying, and the Dwarf Puckfist ; the latter, probably discharging the office of gateward, or porter, during the absence of the veritable official, who, according to Wynfreda's last words, had been dispatched to the Abbey of Tynemouth, for one of the Fathers skilful in leechcraft. And it was thus that opportunity was afforded to our thoughtful Elfin (chance-guided by Nicholas) to conduct thither Du Coci.

No time was now to be lost in planning and conjecturing. The whole range of the caverned windings had, perhaps, to be explored before success ; and, unless Puckfist could act as guide, the task might prove both slow and perilous. The Knight descended in heedful silence, lest a strange step or sound should startle the fluttering spirit of the sick at once from its tenement. He took the passage by which he entered, and pursued it as far as the inlet to that fearful hall, in which skeletons seemed to stand as statues, or to repose, like sepulchral effigies, upon their slabs. Sir Alberic was a brave man, but he

stood by that entrance reluctant to cross its threshold—

“ Bewildered and o’erawed he stood ;”

and felt strangely relieved when he saw the Dwarf approaching, lamp in hand, from the other extremity.

No indecision marked the conduct of Puckfist. He hurried with noiseless foot into the dying chamber, drew forth the hidden keys, like one who well knew the secret of their hiding-place, and then, beckoning the Knight, led the way by another passage and a steep downward stair, until stopped by a low oaken-door, bound, cross-barred, and clenched with iron. He applied the fitting key—entered—and held up the light, and then Du Coci saw, dimly, in the furthest angle, a female form kneeling by a couch, and with both arms crossed upon her bosom.

“ I guess ‘twas frightful there to see,
A Lady beautiful as she,
Beautiful exceedingly !”

It was Constance de Mowbray.

CHAPTER V.

" Now closed is the gin,
And the prey within,
By the rood of Lannercost!"

Bridal of Triermaine.

A GLANCE at the intervening fortunes of Constance is necessary, to explain her transition to the caverned hold of Wolfsic-se-Blaca; the same dark and repulsive Being whom we have hitherto presented as the Invisible and the Avenger.

It will be remembered that De Lacy, in his account of the abduction of our heroine, exulted in the circumstance of De Albemarle's triumph and possession being as short-lived as his own. The good Earl, in fact, had scarcely ridden a furlong with his prize before a shaft from an unseen hand pierced his charger to the heart, and threw both riders violently to the earth. In an instant a crowd of outlaws was upon them. One party seized and bore off the lady, senseless with

her fall ; another manacled her prostrate champion ; and, before the latter could demand a reason or a name, the whole troop was spurring fast and hard to the coast, where a vessel, engaged by Se-Blaca, awaited their arrival, and that of the Avenger himself, after he had discharged another of his peculiar missions. The Earl of Albemarle, however, was indebted to his minstrel garb and incognito for a contempt which gave him speedy liberty. His captors plundered him of whatever appeared worth taking, arms, purse, and harp-wrest ; and abandoned him, thus stripped, upon a bleak moor, to seek first a meal, and then a kingdom. He joined the nearest body of his partisans, took shipping at Southampton, landed upon the coast of Norfolk, where lay the strength of some of his adherents, and marched directly, with his new levies, to join De Mowbray upon the Tyne.

Constance, meanwhile, upon recovering her startled senses, found herself "cabined—cribbed—confined" in a bark, hurrying northward as fast as wind and wave could carry it. Permitted to leave her loathsome "berth," she stood at last upon the deck, amidst a savage crew, who gazed upon her, from under their dark brows and matted locks, as Spenser's satyrs and wild wood

folks upon Una or Britomarte. One of the capturing party acted as skipper. He was a man "having authority," and repressed the curiosity of his staring fellows with sufficient sternness. Once she asked him, in the "lingua franca" of the period, to whom she was a captive ; but he replied, unintelligibly, in downright Saxon, shook his head, and pointed angrily to the cabin. There, when night and necessity drove, the unhappy girl retired ; unmolested, indeed, but with dark presages and misgivings ; and it was observed, by whomsoever entered, that her right hand was constantly within the tunic folds drawn over her left bosom.

In a few days their vessel breasted the surges upon the lofty shores of Yorkshire and Durham, then known under the general name North-Humber-land. They passed the monastery and miserable fishing port of Weremouth ; and Constance soon beheld, with brightening eye and beating heart, the castled priory of Tyne-mouth hanging over the surging deep ; and in which, at that moment, her powerful father held rule and court. The appearance of some vessels off the river mouth alarmed her fellow voyagers. They stood out seaward until night, and then ran by the dim star-light for Marston ;

anchored at high tide near the headland, and landed their charge in a small boat amongst the rocks. Even before gaining the beach, a mantle was drawn almost stiflingly over her head ; and, upon touching terra-firma, an arm of iron sinews bore her up a steep ascent in the cliffs. At last, bolts grated and doors creaked ; passages were explored and steps ascended ; she heard the voices of aged women, and, for an instant, rejoiced to catch the sounds ; forgetful, or ignorant, that, even amongst her own sex, there are those who, in designs of cruelty, yield little to the worst of men. Suddenly the bandage was withdrawn, and she beheld a chamber, or rather dungeon, cut in the rock, as we have described other parts of Se-Blaca's dismal fortress ; and which, as the low door closed upon one departing, seemed abandoned to her sole occupation. It contained only a stone couch, more resembling a tomb ; and had nothing further to relieve its naked hideousness except, upon the walls near the couch, a partial covering of coarse black arras, and, upon the floor, a few dried bents from the adjacent sea-banks.

There was, however, a burning lamp, and even a little fire, with a few billets to prolong its glimmering solace. By this, sleepless and

hopeless, with hands now clasped, now crossed upon her bosom, Constance sat, or paced, at dreary intervals, listening to the shrill winds above, and the hoarse tide beneath ; and still, whenever a sound arose that seemed to vary from these, placing her hand, as we have already described, within the bosom-folds of her tunic.

At last the door re-opened, and a man of a morose aspect entered with a small loaf and a cup. He placed them upon the table, surveyed her from head to foot, by the lifted lamp, with a savage curiosity ; and then, pointing to the viands, said, harshly,

“ Eat, and drink, and be merry, fair Dame.”

She gazed upon him without answering ; and after another brutal stare, he withdrew.

So passed the night.

Morning brought this ungentle keeper again, with another cup, and another morsel of coarse bread ; but he found the first purveyance as he had left it, untouched.

“ Dainty, methinks,” he muttered, “ or moody. As ye list, pale face, as ye list,” and so he vanished.

The fire was not renewed ; and the sleepless girl was fain to pace hurriedly to and fro, to keep her chilled blood from utterly freezing. The

lamp, too, had of course expired ; but a little day-light, as well as air, found its way in by several chinks and crannies above ; and there was one aperture sufficiently wide to afford a glimpse of sky. At last another visitor appeared.

It was the stern Wynfreda. Age had wrinkled, but not bowed her down. Misfortune had made her cruel, not sympathizing. She pointed sternly to the loaf and cup, and said, in cold harsh tones,

“ Eat, minion ! and drink ; thoud’st best !”

She advanced until the light from the rift glanced upon her features, as if desirous that the prisoner might read in them the necessity of obedience ; and Constance looked, and—obeyed. She obeyed ; but, with the first attempted mouthful, sickness and shivering came over her ; and, had she swallowed the bitter morsel, it had choked her instantly. A few drops of the liquid moistened her lips, and then she stood, once more, still, and ghastly, and without uttering one word, either of fear or hope, of question or remonstrance.

“ Afeard of poison, belike ?” said Wynfreda. “ Thou art a fool. It were easier to deal with thee as thou art dealing with thyself—to starve

thee. But the Saxon will neither poison nor starve thee, great Norman dame! Eat and drink, lest, when the bridegroom comes, he find thee lank and ill-favoured, and will none of thee."

"Didst thou say *bridegroom*?" faltered Constance at last.

"Didst thou not hear?" answered the crone, with savage petulance.

"I hear," answered the poor girl, "and may God hear and help me."

"Canst help thyself, fair one, methinks!" said the other with a horrid laugh. "Thou canst stab, ha? but not *true* and *deep*—not to the *heart*. Thou hast but scratched, and angered; and he commends him to thee from his towers of Newark; and bids thee look for him (if it please Heaven, and the Leech) ere thou hast slept two nights alone."

"Alive!!" said Constance, with clasped hands, and in a tone so low with horror, that Wynfreda did not hear, and went on insultingly,

"O! thou shouldst have been a *Saxon*, trodden and spurned, and heart-wrung; braved and beggared by foreign churls; and *then* thou hadst stricken home! a thrust with thy very broidering needle had been worth a thousand lances for the deed. But, hark thee, cold trembler! if thou

wouldst shed blood to purpose, eat and be strong ! drink and curse ! and brood over thy wrongs, and fever thy chilled veins till their red current boils like a mountain stream ! He comes, pretty one ! the great De Lacy comes !—”

And, with this infliction of wretchedness, the she-wolf turned and departed ; locking her captive within, and leaving, although the captive saw it not, a spy upon her agonies. But the mind of Constance was made up. She sat down. Her cheek was quite bloodless. Her eye had a strange sparkle. She drew out, with her left hand, a little rosary, and kissed the suspended Cross,—with her right, the short keen dagger which had so constantly been in its grasp since her captivity. It was De Lacy's—the same with which she had stabbed him.

“ *His* blood,” she said, with a dreadful calmness, “ is upon it. It shall not mingle with mine. Not even thus.”

And slowly and heedfully she applied herself to cleanse and polish it with her tunic-hem ; until the blade, as she held it up to the dim day-beam, glanced clear and stainless. All that escaped her during this process, was in fragments ; broken hints of a dark purpose.

“ Yes—instantly—instantly it must be. Sleep

is treacherous. Food may be drugged. Instantly—while I have yet strength—Raymond !—Oh God !—so young !—”

She started up—pressed her cold forehead with her colder hand—once more kissed the Crucifix, and at the same moment Elfin Puckfist sprang before her, and threw himself at her feet. At another time an apparition so strange and sudden had been worse than startling ; but her high-wrought mind was now beyond an ordinary emotion. The sight of the Dwarf, indeed, suggested the image of his Lord ; and a vague feeling of hope once more sent the poniard to its hiding-place. Eagerly she questioned him of De Albemarle, but he replied only by repeating the same form of gesticulation he had before employed to assure Du Coci of his perfect ignorance. When, however, she uttered the word “ Raymond,” Elfin sprang to his feet, caught the hem of her tunic, nodded repeatedly and earnestly, and pointed downwards ; signs which conveyed nothing to Constance, except, from his general manner, that the object of her inquiry still lived.

Suddenly he addressed himself, with all his pantomimic eloquence, to prevail upon her to take food. He performed the office of “ taster,”

and refused a single answering gesture to her most importunate query until she complied. Satisfied in that point, the Dwarf then busied himself with a scrutinising survey of her prison ; measuring its height with his keen eye ; crawling along the sides of the floor on hands and knees ; prying under the black arras, and thrusting his lank fingers into every rent and cranny of the rock. He seemed at last to find what he required ; a cavity, with a fissure running deep into the outward wall ; and which, with no better instrument than an old *quarel*, or cross-bow-bolt, he immediately began to enlarge ; gouging, and chiselling, and scooping out the limestone at a surprising rate ; and working, indeed, with the furious industry of one who has a heavy task before him, and little time to accomplish it in.

Constance rose from her spare meal to study the mystery of excavation under this strange master ; and, although it was far from obvious what purpose would be answered by drilling through the face of a perpendicular cliff, where the outlet would be at least thirty or forty feet above the level of high tide, yet, such is the thirst for freedom, when worse than death awaits the imprisoned, that the lady soon wrought at the task as hard and sedulously as her instructor.

About two hours wore away at this unwonted toil ; the labourers relieving each other at short intervals ; when, suddenly, a heavy stroke upon the door summoned the Dwarf. The arras was dropped over the cavity. Constance resumed her couch ; and as the door opened for Puckfist's departure, she caught another glimpse of the haggard face of her last janitor.

Every day, at the same hour, the Dwarf now made his appearance with the cup and loaf ; and was, as regularly, locked in by the stern and suspicious Wynfreda, who, sleepless in the due season of sleep, daily at that time slept in her cell, and took this mode of making assurance doubly sure with the yet distrusted Elfin. Every day, therefore, the work of excavation went busily on for the allotted two hours ; Puckfist labouring alone through that period, in order to leave Constance refreshed for solitary toil after his departure, and, at intervals, carrying off and levelling the sandy particles scooped out.

At length, another gaoler appeared. It was Wolfsic-se-Blaca himself ; and the hand of Constance once more hurried into her bosom ; for the voice of this dark Being was terrible, and his eye was cruel.

" Hail, noble Damoiselle !" he exclaimed in

grim irony: “ Daughter of the great Earl de Mowbray ; bride of the mighty Baron de Lacy ! make me proud with thy thanks ; for *this* is *my* Tynemouth—my Bamborough ! and thou hast eaten of *my* loaf, and drank of *my* cup.”

Constance, as we have shown, had wasted no words in parley with Wynfreda, whose fierce and malignant expression shut the door upon hope. But she now determined to try what could be done by appeal to the nobler spirit of man.

“ I have, indeed, drank of thy cup,” she replied, “ and eaten of thy loaf—if thou art the Lord of this dreadful place. Yet it was but to prolong life until a human thing with a human heart might enter and look mercifully upon me. I adjure thee, by all that is most just, tell me why I am thus a captive ! If for the lucre of *ransom*, thou knowest me, and knowest, therefore, who would pay thee even to thy heart’s wildest wish.”

“ I understand,” said Wolfsic. “ But thou art deceived. Tell me ; art thou the beloved of thy father ? art thou as the apple of his eye ?”

The heart of Constance filled, for no assurance was hers of being so beloved by De Mowbray.

“ Wert thou a parent,” she said, avoiding direct reply, “ thine own bosom would answer

thee—thou wouldst know that untold treasures are given as dust of the earth for a child's ransom."

"Were all the dust of his broad Earldom gold of the purest, and poured out at my very foot for thy release," replied Se-Blaca, "I would not forego my grasp upon thee!"

"God of mercy!" exclaimed the captive. "wherefore?"

"Because," he resumed, "whilst thou art here; and while the lust of De Lacy burns; and while Stephen of Albemarle dreams of thee as his Queen; and while De Mowbray counts upon thee as a thing of price to be bought and sold, that his proud foot may trample upon many necks, I gain *that* by thee which is dearer to me than a thousand worlds of treasure!"

"Be not deceived," said Constance, hiding her terror, "What canst thou gain by cruelty which will bring thee neither power nor gold?"

"REVENGE!" answered the gaoler, "Revenge! which, to the heart that pants, and thirsts, and famishes for it, is power, and gold, and wine, and delicacies, and the whole earth, and the best part of that Heaven in which priests would shut it up from stricken fools and trampled cravens! To *my* heart, REVENGE is all this!"

"Blind, miserable, and malignant!" exclaimed the Lady, "*what* wouldst thou revenge? and upon *whom*?"

"Child—fool—and *Norman*! why should I prate of it to thee? but yet—not so," he added, with a fearful smile, "thou art no babe—thou hast written thyself worthy—*thou hast shed blood!* *NORMAN blood!* and hadst thou stricken deep enough, *that—that* alone had been as a ransom for thee within these walls. But he *lives*, feeble one! the hot De Lacy lives! and comes to banquet even now upon thy vaunted charms! Then—when that feast is devoured; and when the feaster in his turn is feasted upon; and when the would-be king, De Albemarle, hath flung himself into my pitfall; then, last and dearest, shall come the master-sacrifice, De Mowbray! to look upon the wide and vasty ruin, with pangs to which hell-tortures are as games of May! and, with his own accursed life, and that of his hot minion Raymond, to——"

"Vindictive devil! and not man!" interrupted the Lady, "Peace in the name of God! and get thee hence!—Fiends are ye all! Thou—De Lacy—the Hag that does ye service—Oh, holy Mother!" she added, fervently lifting her hands to heaven, "if I must needs be haunted with these furies, fill me with *thy*

strength to snatch the prey from the spoilers—to baffle and defy them!"

"Pray long and loud," said the Avenger, or never in these depths shall the Virgin hear thee! So prayed, as I remember me, *another* lady-love of De Lacy's—the fair-haired and the bright-eyed of other days—whose bones——"

He stopped abruptly, as if undetermined to finish a sentence of so much horror, then broke into a laugh scarcely less dreadful—

"Ha! ha! ha! tell me, gentle one, hast thou slept upon yonder flinty bed?" (pointing to the couch) "Nay—shrink not! I go, and thy lover comes—he, the grim gallant of Newark—*fiend*, if ye list to call him so; but not *fiend* or *hag* should ye call *her*, who hath purveyed ye *that* couch for your bridal need! It is a blessed bed, if ye knew all; less dainty, perchance, to tender limbs than the silky down of Norman chambers; but, for a sound undreaming sleep——! Oh, I could show thee, were the hour fitting, *that* which would strengthen thee, with its hidden virtues, to make even the iron heart of De Lacy knock at his ribs! Thou wouldest spare poniards, and seek but to stab his eyes. Such are the choice secrets of yonder couch. But, fare thee well, daughter of the doomed De Mowbray! for

a space I trouble thee no more ; and *be not curious*, Lady, until the hour of need ; lest the hand that would throw fire upon another be itself scorched to the bone ! Eat—drink—sleep—and *search not*."

Thus saying, the Avenger turned and departed; but the spirit of his wild words remained, and lay heavily upon the bosom of the prisoner.

She looked for some minutes fixedly—almost fearfully, upon the tomb-like pallet which had served her for the broken slumbers of imprisonment ; and sought, in vain, to guess even the nature of the occult horrors which Se-Blaca seemed to associate with it. Thick-coming fancies and suggestions, vague images of crime and terror—of darkness and of blood—chased each other in delirious whirl through her fevered and over-wrought imagination. But, though a thousand murders had been done upon its surface, what daggers could that cold stone, offer to stab the eyes of De Lacy ? Had the stern Saxon, she thought at last, ingenious in his cruelty, vented these apparent ravings only to snatch from her the last solace of the miserable—sleep ? To call up, by incantations of terror, the spectral things with which superstition can torture even innocence itself ?

The faint day-beam, struggling through the reef, grew yet fainter, as she communed thus darkly with her excited heart and imagination. Soon all was night, and all was silence ; for not a wind breathed, nor a wave broke, audibly without. At last, whether from refined malice, or something like awakening pity, the door again opened, and the hand of Wolfsic placed a lighted lamp within her reach. She grasped it eagerly, as the bolts shot again into their staples, and obeyed at once the irresistible impulse of her curiosity.

Drawing the scanty coverings from the pallet, she found that the sides only were of stone, a lid of blackened oak resting upon their edges. Then, holding the light in one hand, with the other, eager and trembling, she lifted up the boards—looked for a single instant into the hollow beneath—uttered a faint scream—dropped the lamp, and fell senseless beside it upon the rocky floor !

CHAPTER VI.

" —— Now, at this hour,
Lie at my mercy all mine enemies."

The Tempest.

ENOUGH of the solitary horrors of Constance. We pass the days of silent toil, shared for the usual brief interval by the Dwarf, still her diurnal cup-bearer. We pass the wretched nights worn through in broken slumbers as far from the couch of terror as possible ; and resume where we broke off, at the entrance of Sir Alberic and Puckfist.

It was no moment for explanations, or the forms of greeting.

" Away, Lady ! " cried the Knight, " misery and death are here ! "

" O God ! " exclaimed the startled captive. " a Norman voice ! a Norman knight ! "

" Fly ! " he continued ; " yet but a few lost moments and Destruction swoops upon us ! thy hand ! "

"Take it," she replied, "and may God pity me if I am again deceived."

"Amen," rejoined Sir Alberic, "and judge the deceiver. Now, away!"

They fled along the vaults as fast as Puckfist could lead without extinguishing the lamp ; Du Coci, it must be remembered, knowing whom he protected, but Constance wholly ignorant of her protector.

Their way necessarily led through the chamber of Adaleve ; and her expiring moans struck upon their very hearts as they entered.

"Hark ! and behold," said Constance, "another victim !"

"Now, may God pardon her !" said Du Coci, recalling what he had overheard ; "she hath holp to make many victims ; but her last sin is sinned. She dies, even as I speak."

"Yes," said Adaleve, vainly striving to raise her emaciated frame ; while the pitying Constance bent over her to wipe her filmed eye and chafe her cold hand. "I die, Stranger ! and there are no lips but thine to say, 'God pardon her !' The last of human things that loved or feared, obeyed or cherished, hath fled from me, and I depart like a cast-out dog. The Leech comes not ; the Priest hears not ; there is no

hand to bring a little water to my dying lip ; and my soul, heavy with many sins, goes hence without a prayer ! ”

“ Oh, do not say it ! ” exclaimed Constance, in great horror—and regardless of the Dwarf’s impatient signs for continued flight, “ do not say it. Pray, sufferer ! I will support thee, and bear up thine hands in mine.”

And she attempted to close and raise them for the great charitable purpose ; but the last remains of strength in the dying woman seemed tasked to prevent it. Remorse and despair had fastened strongly upon her.

“ I hear many voices,” she said, wildly, “ crying for mercy—the mercy we never granted ! I hear them in the deep cells below, and the dashing of the tide that strangles them, and their choked sobs and groans ! ——Oh, Wolfsic ! spare ! *my* revenge hath fed full ! Sigeric is weary of slaughter—vengeance is sick within me ! slay De Mowbray in fight, as he slew my Sigeric ; but spare the youth and maiden ! give not his fair child to lust and murder ! doom not the guiltless boy to the wild waves. It was his mother’s crime to wed De Mandeville, and with her blood she paid for it. Take him food, he is famishing, Wolfsic ! thy stern sister hath

broken his staff of bread. Oh, drag him not to those cells of death! it is the flow of tide—I hear it searching the craggy depths, and rising fast to his young lips—look! look! he tugs in vain at the strong bars! they are firm and tyrannous—the salt surf blinds and chokes him—he calls aloud upon his Lord—but De Mowbray hears not! upon *me*, his wretched kinswoman, but a fiend hath tied the hands that would save!—they were strong to destroy, but they are powerless to show mercy! oh, child of my lost sister! Raymond! Raymond! say not that I have murdered thee!"

Instantly as the name thrilled upon her ear, Constance sprang from the dying wretch that uttered it: she spoke no word. The power of utterance was gone. She snatched the keys from the Dwarf as he shook them impatiently at her side, grasped the arm of Du Coci, and fixed upon him a look which never woman half so lovely as Constance fixed in vain upon a brave and generous man.

"Now, by St. Mary," exclaimed the Knight, "it is even so! Raymond also is in these accursed dens. He perishes—he dies—starved or drowned—while we prate here. Away, Lady!

and, for thy life, Dwarf, leave not unsearched even a nook that would nestle a sea-gull!"

They quitted the chamber of death, and followed Elfin upon a new quest.

How pure and holy is the strength of Woman's devoted heart! that night, as Constance hurried through the black and jagged caverns, she would have wrestled with a demon, had such arisen to hold her from the dungeon that held Raymond!

The way now led by the Dwarf had a ten-fold murkiness and horror. Rifts and chasms, blacker almost than blackest night, stretched away on every hand; and, at times, they had apertures to thread resembling the rocky "needle's eyes" of the East, through which only one person could pass at once, and that not easily. At last, in dragging through one of these, the lamp was extinguished by a strong draught of air, rushing as from a door or window suddenly opened.

"Accursed chance!" said the Knight, "who can grope his way in darkness through such a maze of fox-earths and mole-tracks? hie thee back, thou luckless imp, and re-light the lamp; and be heedful of thy neck, in Heaven's name, or ours too will be broken ere we escape."

There was, indeed, no other way; and the poor Dwarf commenced his perilous retreat; leaving Sir Alberic and Constance caged in grim niches, from which they did not dare to move, lest a false step might fling them into some craggy limbo beneath.

“Pray God he return in safety, and with speed!” said Du Coci, “or the hour of vantage will be lost; and those may chance to arrive that will not leave open postern and free passage to go forth as we came in. The Gateward will arrive with the Leech; or perchance this Saxon Devil of Revenge, Wolfsic-se-Blaca himself.”

“Five days,” said Constance, “if I have read aright the mute tokens of the Dwarf, he hath been hence with his fierce band.”

“Aye, Lady; but his promised hour of return is past, and yonder she-fiend, his sister, hath posted forth to hurry him back with signal-beacons.”

“Should it be so—” rejoined Constance, “and God hath not willed that Raymond shall have help at thy hand, lose not any chance of thine own escape, brave Knight, to strive fruitlessly for mine. No! I beseech ye. I have that within my bosom—” she said, (perhaps unconscious of the equivocation,) “which shall fence me yet from

the worst. *Alone, thou hast many chances ; thy sword will cut thee a passage ; and thy foot may spring and clamber where mine could never follow.* But, once in freedom, *this do I conjure thee, fly, with thy best speed, - to Tynemouth ; and bid De Mowbray, if ever the name of Constance—”*

“ Hear me, Lady,” interrupted the Knight; “ I have set my life upon this stake ; and that which hath been oft risked for the poor chance of a poor prisoner’s ransom—nay, for a freak—an idle vaunt shall not now be grudged, when my whole heart burns in the cause that asks it. If Puckfist return, and can indeed guide us to the prison of Raymond, we will have him forth, though we dig for it with our very nails ! If not, and I can fight a way for *thee* alone, out of this den of murder, by Him who helps the helpless ! my heart is firm and true, and my blade is keen ; and strong !—If *this* too be denied, and the Saxon villains hurl me over their rocks, as shepherd boys drown curs, then will it rest with these tough limbs and lungs, whether they have joints enow left unbroken, to drag me to Tynemouth, and breath to cry within its walls ‘‘ Constance and Raymond to the rescue ! ”

“ Now may God and De Mowbray, both,”

said Constance, "bless thee, generousst ranger, for those words!"

"Ah! gentle Lady—" returned the Knight, "God may, and will, if it please him—but for thy Father——— hark! heard ye nothing? listen—."

They listened both—anxiously, breathlessly, and, with the renewed rushing of fresh air, there came a sound of steps and voices, and then a loud clang, as from the violent jarring-to of a heavy iron door, which sent a hundred echoes bounding and rebounding through the caverns. Du Coci loosened his sword in his scabbard, and merely whispered, "Be firm—be silent."

The sounds of approach grew louder and clearer, and at last, a faint gleam of light shot along the ragged ceiling. It grew brighter, and the quick eye of Sir Alberic saw that their position was not unfavourable, unless the approaching parties had to ascend the very cavity where they were now niched in, and where, secure themselves from observation, they could yet glance down upon whatever passed in the vault-like space beneath.

Into that space, two figures emerged from the ribbed entrance. One, bearing a torch was

Se-Blaca ; his companion, to the great surprise of the fugitives, Stephen de Albemarle. . .

“ Tarry here ;” said Wolfsic, fixing his torch in a cranny of the rock ; “ yonder monk must to his penitent ; and I myself must listen to the words of the dying. Misery hath been long here, and now death. Sit, I pray you, and, for a little space, pardon the damp—the chill, and yonder sorry cresset. *My* castle, mighty Norman, is not as Monkchester or Bamborough ; but he that is alone is, at least, *King of himself.*”

“ Aye,” replied his guest, “ the only King who hath not a fool’s trust in whom he governs ; the only King well loved by whom he governs. But let thine absence be brief, good Saxon ; for *to be alone* is self-sovereignty to him only who *chooses* it—as to the hermit in his cell, or the minstrel in the greenwood—not to the sick stretched upon a pallet, nor to the monk pining in a cloister.”

“ No,” said the Avenger, turning and pausing for a moment at the entrance, “ nor to the captive moping in his cage—nor to the fool gulled into a snare.”

He disappeared with the last word, and then the crashing sound, as before, of a heavily-closing gate or portcullis, seemed to make ominous comment upon the evil text.

The Earl liked it not ; and Constance, in whose ears the threats of Se-Blaca were yet ringing, coupling with them all that she now heard and saw, doubted not that De Albemarle's share in those revengeful references was about to be realised.

"He is doomed !" she whispered to Du Coci, "these vaults are the graves of every Norman who enters them—he will perish with us—with Raymond !"

"I like it not," said De Albemarle, soliloquising aloud, and scanning his bleak lodging with uneasy looks ; "Fool, said ye, Gaffer Grim ? by Heavenly Mary, it goes nigh to look so ! I am here in thy black caverns much like a wood-cock in a springe."

"A lion in a pit-fall," said Du Coci aloud, "were the more kingly similitude, methinks." "Who speaks, in the fiend's name !" cried the startled Earl.

"A poor Bachelor, God wot," returned Sir Alberic, "who lifts a Knight's pennon for King William in these evil wars."

"Then, God wot," returned De Albemarle, "I swear to thee, good Knight Bachelor, that thy wars are over and done. Thou art my prisoner. Yield thee, rescue or no rescue ! for this is the castle of my stout and faithful Saxons,

Wolfsic-se-Blaca, and I, Stephen of England, am here in force."

"*Per-force, thou wouldest say, gentle Earl,*" retorted the Knight; "for how think ye of your stout and faithful Saxon, when I, Alberic du Coci, am here in ambush in the very heart of his Thaneship's castle?"

"Palter not with me, for thy life!" said Stephen, "if thou art Alberic du Coci, in very deed——"

"In very deed," said the other, "thou hast paltered with thine own life, De Albemarle. Look! in these dens, from whence, as I well believe, never Norman went out alive, there is but one fate for thee and me, if yonder devil, Wolfsic, deal with us after his malignant wont! But, enough, I am thy prisoner, thou sayst—make it appear. Lay hand upon as thou canst; yet, first," he added, assisting Constance to descend, "behold my rescue or my ransom!"

The astonishment of the Earl was so great that he hardly forbore to drop both sword and torch.

"Constance!" he exclaimed, "Constance de Mowbray! my own—my peerless Constance!"

The words were joyful—but not to the object of their panegyric; they were full of passion—but how unwelcome to the ear they sought to

falter ! Her present feelings, indeed, towards De Albemarle, since his brave attempt to rescue her from De Lacy, were those of kindness itself compared with former impressions ; but the words “ my own !” were a dreadful greeting, and, even at such a moment, she could not bear to pass them unchallenged.

“ De Albemarle,” she said, extending to him her cold hand, “ thou art young, brave, generous, noble ; the aspirant for a kingdom. Thou hast the form and favour which might command thee choice of hand and heart from amidst the daughters of princes—but thou hast no portion in *this* bosom—I cannot love thee, noble Earl. I *have* loved, and I love yet, but *one*, and he is perishing in these abysses of cruelty ! perishing with famine, or in caves searched by the strangling billows !—yet it boots not to grieve or to exclaim—if God send not a very angel to the rescue, *one* fate will speedily crush us all. Yet but a few short hours and the vengeance of the cruel Saxon is complete. Constance de Mowbray will be the bride of Death ; and the love of Raymond, and the rivalry of De Albemarle, and the generous friendship of Du Coci, shall be alike cold and silent for ever.”

The proud heart of the rejected Earl swelled

at the preference thus broadly avowed for another ; and even the closing denunciation scarcely manned him to endure as his struggling pride demanded. He still retained the hand which she made no effort to withdraw, and his own grew almost as cold and feeble. Striving hard, however, to disguise the emotion which shook him, he turned to Du Coci, and said, with haughty sternness,

“Minion of the Red Tyrant! what makes *thee* here?”

“That,” replied the Knight, “which were little in *his* behoof, even had it succeeded—to rescue from these pits a minion of *thy* minion, De Mowbray; one whom, banded even with rebels as he is, I have no choice but to love;—Raymond of the Heart of Steel.”

“Who saith that he is prisoned here?” inquired De Albemarle.

“Thy Dwarf, Elfin Puckfist; other messenger was there none, to play *friar’s lantern** with me into this quagmire of ruin. It was *he*, Sir Earl, that ‘mopped and mowed’ me hither,

* Will o’ the wisp.

“She was pinched and pulled, she said,
And he by *Friar’s Lantern* led.”

L’Allegro.

whether, in truth or treachery I know 'not. But, true or treacherous, he hath been lightened ere this of his load of keys; and now, therefore," he added, taking the torch, "it must be my turn to play the guide. We must back by the path we came."

But ere they could make one step upon the proposed route, Wolfsic the Saxon, once more presented himself.

It was a strange scene, the prison (if such it was) and its contrasted inmates. The yellow rocks and the red torch-light. Se-Blaca (with his recovered keys) startled, doubtless, by the apparition of Constance and Du Coci. The Lady, pale as a spirit, but standing erect, calm, unshrinking, between the stately forms of her armed protectors; and these with each a stalwart right hand resting upon a heavy sword.

Their keen gaze might have disconcerted a feebler man; but Se-Blaca encountered it without one token of surprise or confusion. He was the first to speak;

"What means this?"

"It means," replied De Albemarle, "that thy castle is ill-watched and warded, when whoso listeth may enter and rescue from its prison-chambers the captives of thy bow and

spear. Behold ! thou hast lost a ransom ! and know, too, that forthwith thou must content thee to lose another, or, by my patron saint, *that*, in lieu of it, which thou canst worse spare."

" Name it," said the Saxon, doggedly, " I would fain choose, if choice may be."

" Thy life, caitiff!" cried the Earl, in a voice of thunder; and, striding before the door, he prevented all escape by *that* outlet, while Du Coci kept a like guard upon the other.

" Hast fallen into thine own pit, brave hunter !" continued Stephen, " the choice woodsman is overshot in his own bow. Now, shew me straight into what cleft of these accursed rocks thou hast thrust the boy Raymond. Dost hear, gaoler ?—Raymond of the Heart of Steel ? Nay, dally not ! betake thee to thy keys, and be speedy to let him forth, or, by my eternal soul, I will send thee to ply bolt and bar in the fiery dungeons of Satan ! Look to it, I say, and set on ! "

Not an instant did the aroused Normans suffer the Avenger to hesitate. He was compelled to start upon his ungracious errand, followed and guarded at once by those whom he conducted ; and with a threat, deeply sworn, of being slain without mercy if he made signal for help, by

sound or sign, or failed at last to produce the captive “in life and limb.”

Away, therefore, through vault and gallery, as before, went the redeeming party; Constance following, with one hand firmly grasped in that of De Albemarle.

At length, a steeper descent, a fresher current of air, the dash and murmur of waves, and a strong scent of sea-weed, all bespoke their proximity to the rising waters of ocean. Another of the low, strong, iron-bound doors which secured several of the upper passes, now also presented itself near the end of this lower subterranean range. Se-Blaca unlocked, and dragged it open, and stood upon the threshold, holding his torch as far within as his stretched arm would allow, but the wind occasionally rushed with such violence as nearly extinguished the flame, and he withdrew it.

De Albemarle bent forward, and heard the louder rushing of waves; but could perceive only that they swept through the black arches below, as if a heavy and disturbed sea poured them rapidly in.

“Are these thy dungeons, Saxon?”

“Aye, at the ebb of tide;” was the dark answer.

"The ebb?" exclaimed Du Coci, "and where at the full flow?"

Se-Blaca made no reply, and the heart of Constance died within her as she heard the waters roll and eddy beneath, and remembered the dreadful ravings of Adaleve.

"Best make sure of one torch at least," said Du Coci, thrusting that which he carried into a fissure, at sufficient distance from the draught of the door.

"Right," said Se-Blaca, "lest that which we must needs endeavour to carry be extinguished."

He then advanced one foot upon a plank, resting on the threshold ledge, and which seemed purposed to bridge over the gaping chasm beneath. But, whether from accident or design, it instantly gave way and plunged heavily down.

He turned, with a strange smile, to De Albermarle, "Bridges have evil luck methinks, when thou wouldest pass them."

"When thou art bridge-ward;" returned the Earl, "but it recks not, mighty Thane! the evil chance must be amended. Thou knowest, I warrant thee, a trick to pass this gulph, bridged or unbridged; and if other path there be none to the youth's cell—why, so: enter and betake thee to it as thou best canst, with foot

and hand; and let us behold in what wise to follow."

"And the fair Damoiselle?" said Wolfsic.

De Albemarle took the torch, and again looked fixedly into the gloom beyond,

"Pondering the voyage, for no narrow frith
They had to cross."

The caverned abyss sank sheer down from where he stood, but the side-wall upon the left rose close by the entrance, and it seemed possible, perhaps barely possible, to a strong and fearless man, by the aid of both hands, as well as feet, to find a precarious footing in crevices, and upon projecting points, along its almost precipitous front. But the first attempt, to men loaded with arms and armour, and at the mercy of a trustless guide, was a matter of extreme doubt and peril.

"From hence to where the boy lies shivering," said the Earl, "how far I pray you?"

"Ten strides," answered Se-Blaca, "were there but ground to stride on."

"What bolts and locks betwixt?"

"None."

"Why, then, belike he may as deftly crawl or climb to us as we to him? What lets but that he hear and answer if we call?"

"Nought but these roarers," said Wolfsic, pointing downwards, "But try—call long and loud."

And long and loud, with their united voices, did they call—and call—and call again—and listened, after every cry, with the quickened ear of those who listen for life itself,—but no answer reached them, except the hundred echoes of the caves, and the hoarse voice of the rapidly ascending waters.

"The tide," said Constance, "is fast gaining. Give me the torch, and wait or follow as ye list!"

"Peace, maiden!" said the Earl, sternly, if not harshly; and drawing her back, he motioned to Se-Blaca to enter the gloomy portal.

The Saxon obeyed, with a readiness which perhaps boded little good; directing them to observe where and how he placed both feet and hands; while Constance, who saw, at a glance, the impossibility of her accompanying them, stood upon the brink, holding Se-Blaca's torch as far within as she could stretch her arm for the purpose.

Du Coci first followed, and then the Earl; clinging like sea-fowl to the rock, although nearly dizzied by the rush of the black waves beneath. In a few minutes, Se-Blaca crawled

round a perilous angle, and the Knight, with great difficulty, succeeded in following him ; but all beyond was dark with impenetrable shadow.

"Pass the torch," said their guide. And, with difficulty, it was passed ; from the Lady to De Albemarle—from the Earl to the Knight. Se-Blacea then gained another "coign of vantage," where his footing seemed firm and free ; but Sir Alberic, whose knees and wrists ached and trembled with the unwonted toil, could not move one step from his narrow ledge without the use of both hands, dug into the chinks and fissures. He was therefore obliged to pass the torch into the outstretched hands of the Saxon.

No sooner did the latter receive it, than, with a cry of exultation, he dashed it down into the rushing waters !

"Saxon villain !" cried De Albemarle, "what hast thou done ?"

"Norman dogs !" shouted the Avenger, "Drown ! perish ! rot !"

And then, almost in an instant, an iron grating fell with a heavy clang.

"Oh God !" exclaimed the terrified Constance, "who hath fallen ?"

"Light, Lady ! light !" vociferated both the

victims in a breath, “ the torch ! the torch ! for thy life ! for thy life !”

She darted along the passage to seize it ; but, like a demon upon the wing, the re-appearing Se-Blaca sprang from the gloom beyond, rushed against the dungeon door, closed it in thunder ; and then, seizing the paralysed girl in his iron grasp, hurried her, more dead than alive, back to the redoubled horrors of her horrible captivity !

CHAPTER VII.

"Alone with thee!"

De Moniford, a Tragedy.

For a little while we follow Constance. She regained her consciousness, and that terrible composure which had lately hung about her as a thunder-cloud hangs sullenly in heaven before the flash rends it. She regained them almost before Se-Blaca had hurried half-way back to the upper and habitable part of his dreadful mansion. She had even the self-possession to remember the poniard in her bosom; and, had not Wolfsic's grasp been around her arms, would have exerted once more "the tender fierceness of the dove," and, in a cause so dear and sacred, shed blood again, with still less of feminine compunction.

But the Avenger was not so to be baffled; and she was hurried to her former prison. A ten-fold horror filled it as the accustomed lamp once more shed its sickly gleams, and the huge key

grated in the wards, and told her that all was over. Springing from where her tyrant had *flung* rather than *laid* her down, (that dreadful pallet !) she knelt at the extremity of the chamber, and prayed aloud in her anguish and desolation. Upon a sudden a sound startled her—she looked up and around—*did* the cover of the hollow pallet *indeed* move ? or was it but a feverish fancy ? She gazed and listened until eye and ear seemed alike dead to their functions ; till the first saw all things swim and reel distortedly ; and the last felt as if a benumbing opiate had been poured into it.

But soon, a sharper wrench of agony—a higher strain of terror, gave renewed and treble acuteness to both senses. A figure, habited as a monk—the same spoken of by Se-Blaca, entered and made fast the door within. He was tall and stately, and strode inward more like a mailed warrior than a recluse ; and it *might* be this, and not the mere instinct of woman's horror and hatred, which told Constance, even before the lifted cowl displayed his features, that it was Reginald de Lacy. She uttered no word or cry as he approached ; but sprang like a wounded fawn behind the couch, which, as it stretched nearly the full breadth of the chamber, formed

something like a barrier between them. She then stood erect, in ghastly relief against the black arras; and, silent, bloodless, motionless, gazing fixedly upon him, looked like the spectre of one murdered, standing beside the tomb from which it had just arisen. For some moments, her pallid beauty and marble stillness were terrible; and De Lacy felt sufficiently overawed to pause and contemplate them, without speaking. At last, as he dropped his monastic gown, she broke silence herself; but it was in terms that sounded like insanity.

“Aye! drop it. I know thee; thou art the human devil, De Lacy. Fiend! avoid thee! what have I to do with *thee*? ”

“Much,” he replied, “whether I be devil or man. But I am no spirit, Lady; this flesh is yet sentient—this blood still flows—my heart still beats—and I am *faithful!* faithful as the miser to his gold, the glutton to his feast!—scorns—hatreds—wrongs—stabbings—all these shake not the fixed faith of Reginald de Lacy. Behold me! ”

The eye of Constance wandered, as if vainly looking round for something like defence or rescue. A shudder crept over her whole frame, as she muttered in low tones,

“Alone with THEE!”

“Aye, Lady! where there are none to hear—to pry—to prate—to meddle. Where screams that would pierce a castle-wall die like sick whispers in ears of granite. Where he that is Lord, hates the very name of De Mowbray worse than a goblet of toad’s juice; where the power of the Red Tyrant is a jest, and that of the smooth King Stephen, a hissing and a scorn; where the boy Raymond can do no tricks of chivalry in thy behoof; where I, Reginald de Lacy, am all in all! and thou, Constance de Mowbray, art mine, body and soul! Yield thee! give me a bridegroom’s welcome!”

And he advanced towards her; but the armed hand of the victim rose promptly in her defence.

“Three steps nearer,” she cried, “and God judge betwixt thee and me!”

“Aye, Lady!” said the Baron, “still ‘jouste a l’outrance?’ still thirsting to amend thy botched work of the tourney night? still panting to shed blood?”

“Not *thine*,” she answered, “ruffian as thou art. I leave thee to Him in whose hand are life and death, seasons, and times, and vengeance. I have another and a fairer mark for

this kind steel ; and my hand shall not tremble — my heart shall not fail. Advance thy foot but three paces towards me, and I will show thee, Braggart, that Constancee de Mowbray is *not* thine ; that her pure soul can fly as far from thy base desires as the height of its native heaven from the depth of thy native hell ; that even her feeble body shall defy a touch of thy finger, until her own hand hath stricken it cold and ghastly, a clod, bloodless and breathless ! I could not kill *thee*, Reginald de Lacy, but, thanks to my God who hath made me strong in the hour of need, I feel that, were there a thousand lives in this bosom, I have strength now to strike through them all ! ”

“ Be still ! rash, pious fool ! ” exclaimed De Lacy, hurriedly, and stepping three paces *back* instead of forward, “ be still, and hear me ! ”

“ I will hear thee,” she replied, “ for I seek not to destroy this gift of my Maker until thy brutality gives me law and warrant. But I will not hear thee *long*, lest weariness, and the lack of food and sleep, wear down the spirit of my resolve, and my hand be at last nerveless for the great blow of deliverance.”

“ I will be passing brief,” said the Baron ; “ mark ! thou hast shed my blood ; wert thou a

man, *blood* should repay it ; but, as thou art, and young, and beautiful, and proud of heart, I must avenge me after other sort. I swear to thee, by heaven and earth, thou shall be mine this night, and in this chamber ! but “(he added, stepping back three paces more)” I will swear to thee, also, by whatsoever oath thou wilt, that if thou art wise to keep thine own counsel and go hence smilingly, I, for mine own poor part, will deal full knightly with thee, *and make no boast*. Thou shalt be free to wed De Albemarle, and queen it as he lists ; and then shall no man in the realm doff his bonnet and bend the knee with lowlier grace and seemliness than *your right trusty and most loyal Reginald of Newark.*”

Constance made no answer. She had heard enough ere he had spoken half ; and her thoughts were now far off ; in commerce with higher things and natures, she saw only “white-robed Faith, pointing, with golden rod,” to the mansions where good spirits have no terror of the evil. At length the solemn vision melted, and she renewed, for a few sad links, the broken chain of earthly thoughts and sorrows.

“ Miserable being !” she said, “ thou art the last of human things these eyes shall look upon

—and I will not curse thee. Live; and may God in his own good time give thee remorse and pardon! For me,” she added, looking upward, and fervently kissing the cross of the dagger-hilt, “*my* strife with human sin and suffering is well-nigh over. Yet, but a moment’s prayer for one I love, and——all is well.”

A strange, unwonted, reluctant, misgiving feeling, came over De Lacy.

“It is impossible!” he cried, “thou canst not mean it—thou canst not strike—thou knowest not the black shadows of the terrors of death!”

“If it be so,” said Constance, “I am the stronger to embrace it. In peace—in joy—in the gladness of my childhood, I have thought of it with terror and with shrinking; but not now. The blackness of its shadows is upon me, but, through them all, I see the brightness of my God! the glory of my Redeemer!”

“A dream of monks and priests!” said Reginald, “if thou hadst ever looked on death——”

“I have:” she replied, “not as thou and thy fellow-warriors look upon it, in battle fields, where slaughter is fame and honour—where rage of heart makes cruelty a pastime; and blood is sweeter than wine to the fleshed soldier that pours it forth. Nor as ye see it upon the after-

couch of horror, in prisons, and in castles, when pain hath brought low the terrible, and sickness hath broken the lance and shield ; and when the memory of a thousand crimes shakes the departing wretch into delirium ! *Thus have I not seen death.* But I have seen the last hour of the good and gentle. I beheld the last glance of my sainted mother, and it was bright with joy and faith ! I listened to her last sigh, and it was calm as a sleeping infant's. Oh, that her pure spirit may even now be hovering near, rejoicing that I am strong in innocence to open this dreadful door from thy cruel baseness !"

"A dreadful door, indeed !" said De Lacy, astonished at her resolution ; "and whither leading ? ha ! knowest thou *that?* priest-gulled pretty one !"

"I do," was the solemn answer ; "It leads, Reginald de Lacy, 'to where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest !' Tarry now, or depart—approach, or fall back—as ye list ; I fear thee not—I trust thee not—I go, as I have said, proud man ; but my last act shall be one of love and charity. I warn thee, with dying lips, that, in these caves, *thy* moments, too, are numbered ! Here the Avenger of the Saxons keeps watch and rule, and here, cunning

and fierce, artful and cruel alike, he awaits but thy guilty triumph over a child of his hated foe, De Mowbray, to fall, like thunder, upon thy neck ! the toils are set around thee—the dungeon is prepared. Tarry, if thou wilt, till my blood be poured ; but, if thou canst, then fly ; away ! away ! for thy life, from this grave of many a Norman ! Hurry to thine own powers, if they be near ; or, better yet, to Tynemouth, and return with armed help to those who will else perish in the dungeons beneath us. There are three Normans—noble and knightly—thrust to die ;—one—but that is o'er ! oh, Reginald ! thou to whom earthly honour is all in all, even for that fierce pride which is dear to thee, let not the wild ocean gain its flood-mark, till thou hast broken, with the hand of rescue, into those murderous dens ! If thou dost this, may the lives which thou shalt save, expiate, in the sight of God, *my* death, and every slaughter thou has committed on man or woman ! ”

There was something dreadful to the fierce Norman in the last allusion, whether random or designed. He began, too, to feel that, without any diminution of his guilt, but rather, a consummation more horrid, his prey was actually about to elude him. He recoiled slowly to the

very door of the vault, muttering, “ De Mowbray from crown to toe ! from crown to toe ! ” then, writhing for a minute with contending passions, he cried aloud—

“ Girl ! girl ! am I not a *man*, although a stern one ? and to be won, perchance, by long beseeching ? art thou a woman, and canst not dash thee down, and rend thine hair ? hast thou nor cry nor shriek ? tear nor entreaty ? ”

“ None,” replied the Enthusiast, “ *their* time is past, and *mine*. I hope nothing—I entreat nothing from thee. No, not even to give burial to these poor limbs ! for, if the Avenging Se-Blaca speak sooth, there is *that* stretched even here between us, which tells how vain have been the prayer, the cry, the shriek of woman to thee ! *that* which, in the dark words of thine accuser, might now shake even *thy* iron heart within thee ! a token dug from earth ‘ of the fair-haired and the bright-eyed of other days ! ’ ”

She ceased—pointing to the couch before her ; and the Baron, like one goaded to sudden phrensy, stamped his mailed foot with mingled rage and horror. But, in the next instant, the latter feeling absorbed all others, for the oaken cover of the pallet suddenly fell off, and the hand of a skeleton—the long thin bones, which had

once been fingers—the fingers of a *woman*, were thrust forth, as if in ghastly attestation of the crime that had so stripped them of their once beautiful and sentient covering.

Let us not deprave, with poor and vulgar mysticism, a legitimate scene of terrors—the genuine terrors of human passion and suffering. It was the Dwarf Puckfist who bore this apparently supernatural part in the drama. Fear, when Se-Blaca returned, and perhaps the hope of being yet serviceable to Constance, had driven him to seek a hiding-place even *there*. He remembered the superstitious alarm of De Lacy upon a former occasion, amidst the buttress-shadows of Newan Mynstre, and he knew enough of the Baron and his imputed crimes to calculate the effect of that ghastly greeting at a moment so dreadfully opportune. But oh ! the withering paralysis of guilt ! when a poor abortion, the very jest of man and scorn of woman, could shake the soul of a haughty Norman warrior !

“Thus oft it haps that, when within,
We shrink at sense of secret sin,
A feather daunts the brave !
A fool’s wild speech confounds the wise,
And proudest princes veil their eyes
Before their meanest slave !”

Reginald clasped his hands upon his eyes, as if a spirit had risen before him ; and when, after a moment's irrepressible horror, his desperation withdrew them again, and he saw, standing near the pallet, the same low, dark, shapeless thing which he had chased in vain by Newan Mynstre, his terror was extreme ; it literally rooted him to the earth ; while its object, gliding past the Lady with something like a beckoning motion, raised the folds of the arras and disappeared.

It was then that Constance saw, if not a hope of life, at least a *choice* of death ; and, almost instantly, a sound from without determined her. Puckfist had finished, even at the eleventh hour, the work of excavation ; and there was now another, and perhaps less revolting, wicket opened for her escape. Darting under the hangings, and forcing herself painfully through the narrow breach they concealed, the desperate girl soon placed her unshrinking foot upon the outer ledge of the cliff—looked for an instant to sea and sky—commended her soul to God, and then plunged headlong into the booming waters below !

“ How looked our hermit when the deed was done ? ”

Rage and shame conquered superstition. He

rushed to the hidden aperture—it was too narrow for his bulky form, even could he have dared the tremendous leap beyond—so loaded with heavy armour. But, by violent efforts, he succeeded in stretching his head partially over the outer verge, and looked down as a miser looks upon his dropped casket, or a wild beast upon the prey that has escaped him. It was the grey of morning : and he saw the body of his victim emerge for a few moments from the foam ; he saw it again sink, and again rise ; and then, upon the curl of a large wave, drive shoreward with a fury that, he doubted not, would dash her lifeless upon the beach, to be sucked back by the insatiate Deep with its next recoiling billow !

With difficulty he dragged himself again upon his feet, in the dull vault. The cold light of the dawn streamed faintly in. The lamp was in its last glimmer. The fearful pallet was at his side, and he could not bound over it in returning, as he had done, in his advance. A horrible fascination drew his gaze into its hollow ; and his flesh crept upon every bone as he beheld how ghastlily it was tenanted ! *There* lay the skeleton of his murdered wife, once buried by Se-Blaca, but dug up, to bear its part in the general horrors, when the murderer was expected upon

his base mission to Constance. It lay clothed in the very garments she had worn when the hand of the loved and trusted one struck her to the heart ! that heart so true, and warm, and tender ! They were her *bridal garments*, and even their first lustre had not passed away before the bridegroom's dagger stained them with the crimson of her own pure blood ! Had he been marble itself, the sight had shaken him ! *there* were the rayless sockets in which eyes of surpassing beauty once beamed—beamed, oh ! how tenderly upon *him* ! *there* had once “ hung the lips he had kissed, he knew not how oft !” *there* were the bony wrecks of the hands he had pressed so fondly !—of the sweet bosom that had pillow'd him !—of the lovely cheek that had been pillow'd upon his !

“ O God ! were those the lovely limbs that * * * * ”

He gazed, with irrepressible awe and loathing ; yet dared not look away from the mouldering ghastliness ;—nor stoop to cover it ;—nor even turn his eye towards the door, which he would have given half his Barony to fly through without the delay of unlocking ! At last, dizzied with

* Goethe, *Faust*.

remorse and terror, the spectacle swam before him ; it seemed as if the dry bones moved and would arise. He started—shook off the dreadful trance with an effort as dreadful ; fled out of the chamber of horror with the speed of one who flies from a pursuing spectre ; and, as he rushed along the gloomy passages, his heart beat as though its throbs would burst his mail, and drops of terror gushed upon his brow, like foam upon a flying charger !

CHAPTER VIII.

" Ha ! total night and horror here preside—
My stunned ear tingles to the whizzing tide !
It is their funeral knell ! and, gliding near,
Methinks the phantoms of the dead appear ! "

The Shipwreck.

THE passage along which De Lacy fled had no outlet except through the chamber of Adaleve. The door was closed and fast. There was no sound. He knocked violently with his sword-hilt, and it was opened by Se-Blaca.

The Saxon looked in the ghastly face of his visitor, and, however ignorant of *one* cause of his emotion, readily guessed the other. The Norman, too, upon his part, caught the glance of triumph which told him that his torture was a joy to his savage host ; and, instantly, the conviction flashed upon him that Constance had warned him justly —that *he* too was condemned. His fierce spirit

half resumed its energies with the thought ; and he determined that the purchase of his life should be as a bargain for the skin of the living wolf.

" How now," cried Se-Blaca, " stabbed yet again ?"

" Aye—no—why art thou watching here ?" replied the Baron, wildly.

" Why, rather, art *thou* here ?" was the counter-question—" what wouldest thou ?"

" Fire and air—food and wine ! these, and speedily, for thy life, Saxon !"

" Am I thy hewer of wood, and drawer of water ?"

" To hell with thee and water ! *wine*, I say ! wine—wine ! and *fire*, though the great fiend hew the billets !"

" Why, mighty Norman," said the Saxon, with malignant coolness, " what ails thee ?"

" Much—I am aweary of thy caverns, and of thee. My blood is chilled. Thy chambers are graves !"

" *Graves* !" iterated Se-Blaca—" How fares it with the Lady ?"—

" Well ! never so well. Lacking nor wine nor water !—She is gone !"

" Gone ? whither ?"

“ Whither thou canst not follow. To her Father.”

“ Her Father !”

“ Ay !—her Father ‘ *which is in Heaven*,’—if thou believest in such.”

“ Dead !” said the half startled Saxon : “ Ha ! *couldst* thou—but why ask ! blood will have blood—and thou art a Norman and—a De Lacy.”

“ And thou a Saxon, and a Devil ! her chamber was a charnel !—”

“ Did’st look upon the bones ?” said Wolfsic, and he spoke with an ill-disguised enjoyment of what he inflicted, which was, indeed, devilish. But had De Lacy known how to find egress from those dreadful vaults, or felt assured that it was even possible for him to do so, *that* moment had been the last of the Avenger of the Saxons !—As it was, ignorant by what and by whom surrounded ; in a labyrinth which he had entered blindfold ; .it was necessary perhaps to employ artifice and quiet intimidation rather than sudden violence. He constrained himself, therefore, to answer with calm scorn,

“ Bones ? what be thy bones to me ! there let them rot !”

But the words were scarcely uttered when it

seemed as if a voice from the dead reproached him. It was a groan—hollow and full of anguish—the last of many such—from the lips of the yet painfully breathing Adaleve.

A cold tremor crept through De Lacy. Se-Blaca turned to the couch ; and his stern sister, Wynfreda, bent low over the pillow of the dying, and with a strained ear, caught her last accents,
“ ‘ *Forgive and spare.*’ ”

With these sole-expiating sounds—the haunting words of her last earthly dream—the weary spirit shook off the load of life, and was at rest.

“ She is gone ! ” said Wynfreda. And Wolsic, lowering the lamp, and laying his hand upon her cold and pulseless bosom, knew that it was indeed so—that the last pang was over.

“ Here is more death,” he said, turning to Reginald ; “ more food for the charnel—*this chamber is also a grave.*”

“ Whose grave ? ” said De Lacy.

“ The grave of one who was once mightier than the mightiest of thy Norman kin,” answered Se-Blaca, seating himself beside the dead. “ These wretched limbs, upon this wretched pallet, were once lovely and delicate, and proudly clad, and pressed the down of princely couches, in chambers of kingly pride ! ”

Maidens, to whom those of the best of Norman blood were but as the daughters of churls, took pride to tend upon her. A thousand vassals feasted at her board. A thousand warriors drew the bow at her command!—But thou, and thine, great Baron! thee and such as thee, thy Bastard-King and his robber-captains, came with their conquering thousands, and—behold! for the castled strength of Bamborough, these hideous vaults! for pride, and power, and luxury—misery, want, and death!"

The picture he drew exasperated him.

"Awake!" he exclaimed, in louder and wilder tones, "Daughter and wife of mighty Thanes! widow of murdered Sigeric! awake! arise! the gaze of the insulting Norman is upon thee!"

"Awake Thou, and arise!" said Wynfreda. "A woman's corpse, let a woman mourn. Thou art a man. Sit not to watch the limbs—arise and do the *will* of the dead! Heard ye not her last words—'FORGIVE NOT—SPARE NOT!'?"

The malignant crone looked away from the corpse, and spoke low and brokenly as she uttered the dreadful falsehood. But it sank deep into the soul of Wolfsic. He arose without a word, kindled a torch at the lamp, and beckoning De Lacy to follow him, strode across the chamber.

"Whither?" said the Norman, as they went out.

"Whither thou wilt," he replied; "forth of these caverns, which are aweary of thee as thou of them. Below is thy new King, Stephen of Albemarle!"

"Ha!" exclaimed the surprised Reginald, "What doth he here?"

"He prays the despised Saxon for aid against the tyrant William: for levies from our dens and holes—our mountains and our marshes—our fastnesses of morass—our strongholds of the forest and the reedy swamp. He hath *my* promise, and I *his*. Follow, and thou shalt learn our compact—but it would scantily help to make thee Chancellor or Justiciary in this new world, did the loving Stephen know after what fashion thou hast dealt in yonder chamber, with his plighted bride, Constance de Mowbray."

"Now, by heaven and hell," exclaimed the Baron, "if thou hast whispered even to the very winds that blow upon De Albemarle——"

"Peace, and follow," interrupted Wolfsic. "thy counsel is in thine own breast. Tell thine own tale, why thou art here, and fear not."

"Fear!" cried De Lacy—"but when goes he hence?"

"When the tide is at highest," said the Saxon. "Then, good Reginald De Lacy, I swear to thee, *nor thou nor he shall choose but depart!*"

They forbore to speak, and passed on ; Wolfsie showing the path,

"By winding stair, dark aisle, and secret nook,"

De Lacy with his hand upon a poniard, and his sword loosened in its scabbard, ready to resist, or at least, to revenge treachery. At last appeared another of the many low dungeon-like entrances we have described.

"Within," said Se-Blaca, as he applied the key, "there is a captive. Why should he eat his heart in solitude ? I will release him to ye without a ransom, for the love of the princely Stephen, and his great ally De Mowbray."

He unlocked and thrust open the wicket ; and, in a cavity of a few feet square, stretched upon the cold rock—worn and haggard, but alive, De Lacy saw the prisoner. He saw, too, that it was Raymond.

The torch light, and the grating sound of the door, startled the youth from his sad slumbers. He rose—looked in the countenances of both visitors, and doubted not that he was

indeed to be liberated,—through the gates of death.

De Lacy, and Se-Blaca were alike heedful not even to cross the threshold of the vault; but the latter waved its pallid inmate to come forth. He obeyed, with a firmer step and more erect gait than his sunken cheek and narrow dungeon could have promised.

Thus increased, the little party proceeded without a word, until they reached that gloomy hall which had so chilled the spirits of Du Coci with its spectral terrors. The glaring torch now shewed in stronger relief than the Dwarf's lamp those dismal emblems of mortality that upon every hand stood like phantoms or lay like effigies, and had a ten-fold hideousness from the distortion of the rude mechanism by which the members of each were attached and supported.

De Lacy looked around him with renewed disgust, and could not help exclaiming,

“ Mary-mother ! what loathly things be these ?”

“ The bones of men,” said the Host. “ Of men,” he repeated significantly—“ therefore be not afraid. They are mute and peaceful now, these fleshless things ! they swear not, neither do they stab. It is good for us to look upon

them, and to remember. Is it not well, good youth?" turning to Raymond, with a grim scowl less ghastly than that of the skeleton-things around him.

" It is good for us to remember the dead ;" said Raymond, calmly,—" and that we too must die ; some in the peaceful bed, as thou wilt never do,—some on the battle-field, as I had once a hope,—some in dens of treachery, as perchance these have done, and I (if it be thy pleasure and De Lacy's) may speedily do. It is good, doubtless, to remember all this, but thou, Saxon, who wert once a monk, shouldst remember also, ' dust to dust, ashes to ashes.' The grave is the dead man's castle and sanctuary, and the living should take shame to plunder it."

" Bones of my fathers !" cried the Baron, " it is well said ! thrust me these grinning jaws and mouldering shanks into their earth-holes, and be the hand accursed that digs them up again ! Pah ! let us hence—the air is dank and heavy with their rottenness !"

" Tarry," said Se-Blaca, " these bones are the skeletons of Worthies who craved better things at my hands than to be thrust into forgotten graves. Normans all,—warriors and priests ! I have toiled and bled to make them mine, and

snatched them from corruption and the worm to range them here ; as other halls and bowers have for their adornment the things of chiselled marble and painted cloth. *These, these* are the statues and the lymnings which pleasure me ! these, indeed, keep fresh in my remembrance the hands that grasped, the feet that trampled—no matter upon whom or what. See ! they that were mighty warriors I have propped erect, as when, in rage of heart, they defied man and God ! and they that were shaven priests I have laid along in meek humbleness, as when they stretched themselves in prayer, by the altars from whence with fire and sword they had driven the Saxon ! —— Look," he added, pointing to the nearest ; " *this* peaceful, prostrate thing, was once Robert of Limoges, a holy Bishop of Lichfield, if ye be well remembered. Here do I honour him for breaking with the strong and the crimson hand into a Saxon abbey in Coventry, driving the brethren forth to starve and rot ; and, with the plunder of their coffers, and the ore of their melted plate, building him up a stately pleasure-house ! behold ! he is *here* ! —— *This*," touching another, was the pious and gentle Remi of Fescamp—he, too, for a boon of fifty boats to the great Norman Duke that would

be King, became a Bishop and a Tyrant, and, for a thousand wrongs to the Saxon, is honoured *here* and *thus*.—*Here*,” indicating a third, “was another of the holy ones of Fescamp—Red-handed Torrauld, a mitred Abbot, for his zeal to shed the blood of the Saxons. Better he loved the battle-axe than the crozier, and therefore did the mighty Bastard give him rule over a convent at Peterborough, near the camp of the rebel Saxons, that, while the priestly lover of cruelty damned himself with slaughter, he might, at least, give pleasure and profit to his King. There was he slain by a Saxon shaft, and there did I treasure up his bones!—*These*,” passing to a fourth and fifth, “were once the charitable Guerin de Liri, and the Ruthful Paul of Caen, of whose souls, next to the pouring out of innocent blood, the sweetest delight was to tear from their quiet sepulchres* the bodies of the Saxon Abbots who had gone before them, and, piling them, like filth, upon a heap, to burn them with fire beyond the abbey-gates! *Their* graves, Sir Squire, were neither castles nor sanctuaries to the poor sleepers! and

* The reader must observe that all these little amiable instances, cited with such unction by Se-Blaca, are historical matter-of-fact: “Fiction is strange—truth is stranger.”

therefore did I steal *these* bones, and here do I give them honour!—But look!” pointing to a sixth; “*this—this* was the beloved of the great Norman Conqueror! the Norman Priest after the Norman Tyrant’s heart! sleek Tonstain of Glastonbury! who, with the strong arm of power, thrust from his long held abbacy the aged Saxon, Egelnorth, to wander in sickly eld, and pine and perish for lack of bread! Full jolly priest was Tonstain! a lover of holy glee-craft after the fresh fashion of the Normans; and when his monks (who loved the old Gregorian chaunt) sang not to the delight of his dainty ear, he stamped with his mailed foot, and cried aloud for his armed vassals* to shoot, and stab, and spear them, even by the altar of God, until their blood streamed down the holy steps to the chancel pavement!—And ‘lo!’ advancing to a seventh, “lo, yet again! this bulky wreck was once the body of William, Bishop of Hereford. Mark, noble Baron of Newark! the kisses of a thousand delicate ones could not now redden these bony cheeks with a pleasant touch, or put lascivious fire into these gaping sockets! yet *he* was the

* “A moi! mes hommes d’armes!”

lustiest of the wanton, and died by the weak hand of a virgin, to whom, in his hot mood——”

De Lacy broke upon the ill-timed tale by such a grasp of the Saxon’s arm as might have cracked the very sinews of one less hardy.

“Enough of thy filthy bone-house!” he cried; “pass forth, in God’s name, and speed us hence.”

“Be it so,” rejoined the Saxon, “*the tide will speedily be at full.*”

Quitting the hall of skeleton^c, they were soon in the very passage along which Se-Blaca had conducted his recent victims. They paused at the same terminating outlet, and heard the same rushing of wind and wave, but louder. The door was again unbarred and opened. It *had been* so once, at least, since closing upon De Albermarle and Du Coci; for there was now a fresh plank stretching from the brink of the chasm, by the door, over to the reef that, about half-way across, served as a pier to the rude bridge. They passed it singly; Se-Blaca first and Raymond last.

“A grim fortress thine!” cried De Lacy, “with fosses running betwixt its very chambers! a frail bridge, too, methinks; and I remember me, Saxon, thou art but an evil Bridge-ward.”

"At times, great Baron," was the reply, "to serve *thee*. But, frail or firm, this bridge must serve us for both fosses."

They drew it up accordingly, and, with their joint strength, succeeded in over-laying one end to the edge of the rock beyond ; a distance, perhaps, of twelve feet ; the tide, as Se-Blaca had said, now fast rising to its height, rushing and eddying with great violence beneath.

Guide and torch bearer as before, the Avenger still took the lead. He passed in safety to terra firma ; but with no intention that the steps of others should do so. The result, indeed, may be guessed !

The instant he pressed the solid rock with one foot, with the other he spurned the plank heavily down into the billows ! the torch followed, and all was darkness. Then came the clang of the secret grating by which he had escaped, and, when it struck the ears of the betrayed Normans, they found themselves islanded upon a point of rock little more than sufficient to give them standing room ; without a ray of light ; and unable to stir a foot, except at peril of falling headlong into unknown depths, through which the surges were rushing in full career !

For some moments they doubted the treachery which had snared them. They called; but no answer returned from their Betrayer; and, though replying sounds seemed indeed to come from beneath, they were confused with those of wind and wave and echo. Still, the listeners fancied human tones, indistinct from distance as well as other causes; and while De Lacy vented one fearful imprecation upon another, Raymond calmly suggested that nothing remained for them but to attempt a descent, and, following the supposed voices, find the inlets by which the tide searched the caverns. Strong swimmers might thus escape to the open beach, and, once there, Tynemouth lay near, both for refuge and revenge.

There was no alternative. Hunger, darkness, the dizzying whirl and rush below, would in a short time topple them down, willing or unwilling. De Lacy, therefore, abandoned the greater part of his armour, and they descended—slowly, painfully, and with such strain upon nerve and muscle as only those who clamber in darkness and in danger can describe.

At last, they plunged into the waters, and were dashed from side to side by the strong surges, until, by dint of hard swimming, strug-

gling, scrambling, wading, and every species of toil, over sunken ridges, and through craggy arches, the “forth-rights and meanders” of the tide, they saw, once more, the welcome glimmering of day.—But why dilate upon these cavern-horrors, and chain the reader also amongst them, until weariness deepen to disgust? let us be brief. They saw light, indeed, and heard nearer voices, and clambered to where those who had preceded them in mishap, wearied with fruitless exertions, stood now upon the highest ledge of rock they could command, to rest, at least, their weary arms—*stood*, we say, for, even then, the rising waters were already above their waists. It was thus that the four victims encountered; but the last comers had the worst to learn from their companions; namely, that all egress by the craggy mouths through which the tide rushed was *impossible*—forbidden by massy iron-bars socketted in the rock above and beneath! This the Earl and Du Coci had ascertained, and were now awaiting only the full flow of the strangling waters.

It was horror, which nothing but the fierce ingenuity of Hate could have devised! and to which only the pencil of “Nature’s sternest painter” could do justice—

" Again they joined in one long powerful cry—
 Then ceased—and eager listened for reply—
 None came ; the rising wind blew sadly by.
 They shout once more—and then they turn aside,
 To see how quickly flows the coming tide !
 Between each cry they find the waters steal
 On their strange prison, and new terrors feel.

Fast rose the surges o'er the lessening strand,
 And they seemed sinking while they yet could stand.
 Bleak and more bleak, more wet, more cold it grew,
 And the most lively bade to Hope adieu !
 Less and yet less the sinking rocks became,
 And there was rage and wailing ! wrath and blame !"

No ! *wailing* there was not. Even the worst tempered spirit amongst them was too indomitable for *that*. And the time for *rage* was nearly gone by. Yet, between the intervals of silent agony—perhaps of prayer and penitential thought with some—hands were clenched in sudden paroxysms ; and teeth were grinded ; and half-formed curses half-uttered ; with vain wishes for help, and for the strength of furies to break their bars, or rend asunder the rocks ! for the power to breathe under the billows till the next ebb—for anything that was most vain—idle—remote—impossible ! anything rather than die a death so miserable—so inglorious and obscure !

But it was fast approaching, and there was no hope !

None could reproach, or attempted to reproach, another ; but again and again did each exclaim to each, “ Oh ! that thou had’st stabbed him to the heart ! cleft him to the brain ! ”

Then, as their span grew narrower, some object, dearest to each, arose with poignant vividness ; tugged at the heart-strings ; rivetted them to earth and life ; called distractedly back “ those thoughts which wandered through eternity ; ” and cried, as it were, to the sick bosom, “ O ! had it not been for *this* ! ”

Raymond endured without one audible paroxysm : yet, bitterly, bitterly did he think of his lost Constance ! . and when the memory of past dreams of ambition, as well as love, came darkly across him, there came with it, as if uttered but an hour before, the first threats of “ the Invisible of the Forest,” that “ the last of a mighty line should perish *as in a cleft of the rock*, where Honour looked not upon Death, and the voice of Praise was silent for ever ! ”

The spirit of De Albemarle, too, turned to Constance, for his love had been no idle passion ; but he had also to brood over a lost kingdom.

"Is *this* my victory and my realm! This my throne! From the dungeon to the grave," he repeated again and again, "one step for a Prince!"

The savage Reginald looked back upon a thousand crimes; and never before had the retrospect been so dreadful. "Hell was moved at his coming," and seemed to send forth its impatient phantoms with multiplying and anticipating terrors. Yet Pride grappled to the last with impenitent Remorse; and he continued, in horrible iteration, to vent the same unvarying curse upon his betrayer.

Du Coci alone, light-hearted to the last, uttered neither sorrow nor malediction. He left none to mourn except his trusty squire; and his deepest regret was uttered when he had exclaimed, "Ah, my poor Nicholas! I would that, before this, thou had'st either won gilt spurs in a pitched field, or gone back to comfort the grey hairs of Jodesac in the Jewry!"

The waters were now breast high around them. Every wave rose nearer to their lips, and dashed its salt spray into their faces with more blinding fury. The little light that glimmered at first was nearly all shut out by the rising wall of waters. The sea-mew clapt his heavy

wing unheard near the barred mouths of their tomb. They saw, they heard, nothing that spoke of life. Had they been *giants*, it would not have availed, for the low roof allowed none to stand erect ; and quite as vain would have been the skill of the strongest swimmer, when the whole caverned space was filled with the strangling waters !

All but De Lacy interchanged forgiveness and farewell ; and then there was the silence of the brave and the proud, who meet Death at last without a sound of wail or fear.

Another minute—another wave—and—hark !

“ God in heaven ! ” exclaimed De Albemarle, “ there is help ! ”

Oh, how dear, how sweet, how joyful, that blessed word !

Just as he uttered it, the single sound he had caught, was followed by a cry of many voices, so loud and shrill that it seemed to the imprisoned as if *that* alone had broken their prison bars !

They *screamed*, rather than shouted in reply, as men who scream from the jaws of death ; and then, clang after clang, came the tremendous blows of the huge hammers of Tynemouth armoury, as (in boats rocking by the nearest cavern mouth) the forge-men swung them like

very Cyclops ! Away, in a few seconds, like lances shivered in the charge, went every bar ! The captives swam, with the strength of mingled hope and desperation, into broad ocean and broad day ! They were taken up half dead with exertion, cold, and despair, and rowed to a bark in the offing ; and when Raymond, more exhausted, perhaps, than his companions, cleared his eyes from the salt surf, the first object he beheld upon the deck was Puckfist, the dwarf ; the next was De Mowbray, of Northumberland.

CHAPTER IX.

“ Blest power of sunshine ! genial day !
What balm—what life is in thy ray !
To feel thee is such real bliss,
That had the world no joy but this,
To sit in sunshine warm and sweet,
It were a world too exquisite
For man to leave it for the gloom,
The deep cold shadow of the tomb !”

Lalla Rookh.

“ THAT there was an ancient priory at Tynemouth is certain. Its ruins are situated on a high rocky point, and doubtless many a vow was made to the shrine by the distressed mariners who drove towards the iron-bound coast of Northumberland in stormy weather.”

So says the mighty Master of Romance departed ; and never, we believe, did the towers of St. Oswyn, in the worst storm, look down upon mariners or landsmen, who had more reason to feel religiously thankful than some upon the deck of the little vessel that, bearing merrily away from Marston, before a whistling breeze, rounded, in a few minutes, the vast promontory upon which

they are based. Few, indeed, had ever been snatched more wonderfully from the jaws of the great Deep, and if the recovered victims looked with grateful awe to the shrine of the local saint, whose tutelary good-will they might conceive instrumental in saving them, it was, then at least, a very pardonable superstition.

And, oh! how beautiful did the grey towers—the rocks—the sands—the fisher-sheds—the meanest objects seem to those eyes upon which the gloom of Se-Blaca's caverns had lain for hours with a weight like that of the valley of the shadow of death ! The wind blew balmily from the joyous south-west*. The dull cold “*fret*” of the preceding day was gone; the blue sky laughed out in the full joy of its summer beauty ; and the morning sun blazed with unsurpassed splendour over land and main, cresting the purple clouds and billows with flashes of golden glory, and lighting up even the else dull shores and savage rocks with gleams of yellow lustre.

We said that Raymond caught a glance of Earl de Mowbray. It was but for an instant, as the latter descended with De Albemarle and

* “ Blaw the wind southerly, southerly, southerly !
Blaw the wind southerly, south and south-west ! ”

Melodies of the Tyne and Wear.

De Lacy to the cabin, and he did not even feel assured that *he* was seen by the Earl—yet, at that moment, did a presentiment of evil fall like a sudden shadow across his mind—a misgiving as to his reception by him for whom he had dared, and toiled, and suffered so much.

The human heart is, no doubt, superstitious—prone to hearken to false oracles ; but, it must be allowed, possesses often a wonderful power of true divination. Who has not observed with what occult subtlety it sometimes takes a warning or a presentiment, almost amounting to conviction, from things which, in themselves, have not the weight or the validity of straws ? detecting the first faintly-approaching dimness of those shadows which, according to the poet, coming events project before them ?

The “*mauvais presage*” hung so heavily upon Raymond that, notwithstanding all he had to communicate, he felt a repugnance to follow De Mowbray, or to request an interview. Their short voyage (about three miles) gave little time for hesitation. The cabin conclave re-appeared ; and it seemed to him as if care was taken that neither himself nor Du Coci should accompany them in disembarking. Neglected they certainly were not ; but the attentions paid were so equi-

vocal that it might well be questioned whether they formed the ceremonial of attendance, or of custody. Raymond looked in the face of his companion, but read nothing there to reassure him.

They landed in the little bay still called Prior's Haven—Raymond and Sir Alberic last; and the latter saw that, upon the shore as upon the vessel deck, every head bowed and every knee bent, as the great Earls passed along the beach. Short as was the distance, horses were provided for these magnates, and for the Baron of Newark; and so, while the Knight of the Broken Lance and the Squire of the Heart of Steel followed humbly on foot, guarded rather than conducted, the party entered, amidst acclamations and minstrelsy and trumpet-peals, the massy walls of Tynemouth—

“ Half church of God—half castle 'gainst the Scot.”

The gateway still stands by which they entered; a tower nearly square, with a circular exploratory turret at each corner. But how changed is all within! The whole area, of perhaps six acres, presents only scattered masses of ruin, graceful and solemn, but so shattered and disunited, that even fifty years ago an antiquary in vain attempted to assign each remnant

to an individual office; while modern buildings, a barrack, and a light-house, and gravestones of recent erection, recal the mind to the living and the dead of our own age. There are, however, the remains of cloisters, and of a magnificent church, and every where masses of foundation, which speak plainly the great extent of superstructure they once supported.

Far other was the scene that met the eye of Du Coei, when the vast unimpaired edifice, redeemed from every mark of elementary and Danish fury, stood in crowded magnificence, at once a palace, a fortress, and a monastery.

They passed a deep outward fosse, over a drawbridge defended by moles on either hand, and then the gateway described above; a two-fold entrance, the huge tower comprehending an outward and interior portal, both with double gates, six feet apart; and the former with a portcullis and an open gallery. The space betwixt the gateways was a square of about six paces, open above, to allow those on the battlemented top the power of annoying assailants who might gain the first pass. From this main entrance a strong double wall extended on both hands to the sea-rocks, which, in some places, especially on the north and east, had an almost

perpendicular fall of, perhaps, ten fathoms. So that the defences, natural and artificial, were alike exceedingly strong. Built, indeed, to defy the fury both of the elements and of man,

“Winds, waves, and northern pirates’ hands.”

the monastery itself was, originally, a powerful structure ; but De Mowbray, immediately upon taking a hostile position with Rufus, had rendered it nearly impregnable by every possible addition and modification.

The court-yard and outward walls, in fact, presented a scene of astonishment to Raymond. All was military bustle and preparation. Every sound and sight, and there were many, spoke of anticipated battle and siege ; and had not an occasional brace of monks, with their dark gowns and hoods, entering or issuing from the cloisters, recalled at times the idea of a convent, it might well have been lost in that of a strong castle about to be beleaguered by a determined enemy. On all sides, but especially on the landward, hundreds of craftsmen and artisans were busily occupied either in the construction or erection of vast propelling machines, such as formed the artillery of the period. For the easy moving and working of these along the

walls, immense platforms were building, with flights of steps at intervals for ready and rapid ascent ; and there might be seen, (their names as savage as their office), every variety of the Balistæ and Catapulta species ; the Mangonel, the Onegar, the Trebuchet, and the Petrary ; the Verge, the War-wolf, the Ribaudequin, and the Bricolle ; the Mate-griffin, the Matafunda, the Scorpion, and the Espringal. Some of these delicate engines were for hurling huge stones ; some, immense beams and stakes ; some, for both missiles, and, when occasion served, even the bodies of men and horses. It was abundant occupation for many labourers, to bring in or prepare the shot for these machines ; to collect the stones, and sharpen the stakes and bolts. A hubbub of sounds, therefore, little savouring of the monastic, arose from all sides. There was the heaving of armourers' bellows, and the clank of their vast hammers ; and the jarring of sword and battle-axe upon grindstones ; and the hurrying to and fro of the Fletcheur's (or arrow-maker's) men ; and the arrival and departure of couriers ; and the entrance of wains, loaded with forage and supplies ; and the marshalling of retainers, by newly-arrived tenants ; and the practise of military games, by young cavaliers,

“*en pupillage*” to the grim Men-at-arms, who, in the least encumbered places, managed their Flemish steeds, or breathed their lighter haekneys ; and tilted, and flung the mace, and burnished their arms ; and made the grey walls ring with shout, and laugh, and song, and the clang of steel.

In the midst of all this uproar, loudest of the loud, and busiest of the busy, was the unvenerable, but most stout and stalwart, Prior Baldwin ; the same burly Ecclesiastic for whose warlike propensities, and love of the carnal weapon, Earl Mowbray had incurred the censure and denunciations of Anselm, the Primate. Raymond, indeed, to whom the philippic had been uttered, and who, it may be remembered, had done his best to defend the accused, could not help contrasting the present spectacle with that picture of cleric gentleness and humility, drawn by the fervent Archbishop in the garden of Newan Mynstre.

Too busy, now, in fact, was the worthy Baldwin, for alms or shrift—for bell or book ; and, in especial, much too busy to recognise his young friend, Raymond, who saw, at the first glance which met the Prior’s, that the latter was not disposed to receive greeting or reverence

from him. It was another of those evil signs which prefigured something dark and ungracious approaching. But every circumstance of their entry had a like unpromising, repulsive aspect ; and Du Coei, who had, perhaps, expected to see his companion in immediate office and authority, was not slow to divine that some stars had fallen from the youth's sky.

" *Here, gentle Raymond,*" he said, " *I, doubtless, am a captive,—what art thou?*"

" Forgotten, methinks,"—was the answer. But Raymond needed little further to convince him that worse than forgetfulness was at hand, (if to a proud spirit worse can be), when, in the man-at-arms who commanded the conducting party, he recognised a fellow whom he had once punished for drunken insolence and misrule. If more was needed, it came speedily. As they waited, near the gate of the Keep, until final orders arrived for their disposal, he met the eye of his quondam fellow-Squire, Torfin Paganel, who, looking upon him without deigning to utter a word, passed to the court of guard, followed by several pages and retainers, and with a prodigious air of authority and consequence.

Raymond's insulted heart swelled up at the sight of the coward who had deserted him so

basely in his need ; and the suspicion flashed upon him, that to the slanders of this miscreant he was probably indebted for his present cheerless reception. Alas ! he little guessed that there was *another* within those walls, whose hatred was as great, and whose malice was infinitely more availing.

While yet lingering "upon the cold foot," he saw the object of his resentment reappear from the court of guard, mount a courser, and ride out at full speed ; being dispatched to apprise the garrison, at "the New Castle," of the safety of De Albemarle.

They were conducted, at last, to an apartment, which was at least not a dungeon, for the grated windows looked out to the bright sky and glittering ocean. There were refreshments too, and some articles of dry clothing ; but they heard bolts and bars without when the door closed upon them.

"Look, Raymond," said Du Coci. "I am come from Heaven's blessing into the warm sun. If De Albemarle bestir him not to deal generously, and to stand betwixt thy Lord and me in this evil day, I have but exchanged one door of death for another—the choking billow for the headsman's block."

He then, to the surprise and, indeed, sorrow of his companion, revealed, for the first time, his name and history ; that portion of the latter, at least, which involved his deadly feud with De Mowbray—the accusal—the combat-trial—his defeat, and those threatening assurances, given of late by Montgomery, that the Earl of Northumberland retained so deadly a sense of the quarrel as to have sworn, at the high altar of Durham, that seven weeks should not elapse from the period of his rival's return to England, before the celebration of a death-mass for his soul in that very building.

This was a dark leaf to the astonished Squire ; but not the only one he had to turn over. The whole out-break and progress of the rebellion, nay, every human transaction, private or political, had been as a shut book to him in Se-Blaca's dungeon ; and when Sir Alberick recounted all that had passed, not omitting the fate of Constance, whom he supposed still in the narrow caverns of Marston, his listener paced the chamber as a wild animal paces its den.

Suddenly the door opened and De Albemarle appeared.

“ Give me thy knee, Du Coci,” he said, “ and I will give thee life. It is forfeit else.”

"To whom?" inquired the Knight, superfluously.

"De Mowbray," replied the Earl. "His foot is upon thy neck ; and I have no power to thrust it thence, whilst thou art banded with the tyrant William. Thou, too, Raymond, art under shadow, and I have one speech for both ; know me for your King, and do me homage even now ; or take the horns of the altar, and the chance that follows!"

"I will take the horns of the great Devil first!" said the Knight bluntly. "Thou art Earl of Albemarle methinks, and a King's cousin, but no more *King* than I am Mahound of Tartary!"

"Be it so :" rejoined Stephen. "I grieve—for it was *my* Dwarf that led thee into yonder trap ; but it was De Mowbray's vassals who drew thee forth, and I may not tear from his burning lip the vengeance he hath long thirsted for, while thou art a rebel to me—a traitor to the great cause of English freedom."

"Ah ! Fiend take it !" cried Du Coci. "So ye *all* prate that would be Kings ! It is nought with ye, at first, but smooth brow and gentle hand ; and never a word of tax or talliage, wardship or forest-law, till ye be crowned in-

deed, and then the new lion hath longer and sharper claws than the old one. But it recks not. I have done homage, and I have sworn fealty to King William, and by St. Michael and St. George ! I will not break oath and faith for *twenty* lives, take them who list !”

“ Why — thou hast said,” answered De Albemarle, and then turned him for answer to Raymond.

“ There is no blot upon my faith,” said the youth—“ no flaw in my love, that De Mowbray should hold threat over my life ; nor that *thou*, Sir Earl, shouldst bid me indeed play the traitor and the rebel by swearing fealty to a pretender. Who made *thee* Sovereign Lord of England ? and who hath owned thee such ?”

“ God, and *thy* Sovereign Lord De Mowbray,” replied Stephen. “ He hath done me homage for his Earldom, and *thou*, of his banner and his household, art my subject. Confess it so, and, by St. Oswyn ! I will save thee from his anger, just or groundless. Kneel, and arise a Knight !”

“ I thank thee, De Albemarle,” said Raymond—“ but will not *so* purchase protection at the hand of living man. If slander hath blotted me from De Mowbray’s grace, set me

before him, brow to brow with my accuser, and upon the issue be life or death."

"I hear thee—I have heard ye both," said Stephen, "and call God to witness, that I have done what man could do. Farewell, *thy* blood, Du Coci, be upon thy head!"

"Amen," said the Knight, "if in the sight of God it rest not upon that of another! but tell me, I beseech thee, De Albemarle, how fares it with thy 'good Saxon ally Wolfsic-se-Blaca?'"

"As with the Devil that aids him, till the great day of compt," replied the Earl. "He hath escaped—mortal man knows not how, or whither. Puckfist, within this hour, hath led a chosen band through the windings of his web; and, in all those accursed dens and caves, *he*, nor the hag his sister, are to be found—the very corpse hath vanished! But I swear to thee, Alberic du Coci, if the Saxon caitiff press ground in realm of mine, thou shalt one day be avenged for *thy* share in the briny tortures of his dungeon."

He turned to depart—but, as the door opened, Raymond cried with an anxious abruptness,

"In God's name, tell me—what of the Lady Constance?"

"She lives!" replied the Earl, sternly, "and with *that* content thee, presumptuous fool!"

So saying, he disappeared.

"Cheer thee, Raymond!" said Alberic, after a melancholy pause.—"Cheer thee, Heart of Gold, as well as Steel! Priests say, that sparrows fall not to the ground without special note; and surely the worst of us twain is better worth than a whole forest-full of sparrows, and sparrow-hawks to boot! Never aught but good service hast *thou* done to Robert de Mowbray, and Slander can hardly *yet* have noosed a halter for thy neck. *My* sky hath a blacker cloud; but I have still hope. King or no king, De Albemarle is right noble, and his Kingship is cheap indeed if he hath not power over De Mowbray's thirst for this poor life. There is the Damoiselle, too, the lovely Constance; *she*, methinks, should plead well—but," he added, "should the worst befal me—look, Raymond!" taking a ring from his finger, "this is my signet. Nicholas, and the captains of my host, will obey the wearer: take it, save thy life as thou canst; and away from this rebellious Hold to my entrenchments upon the north bank of Tyne, where I would to God I had tarried till now, fishing for gudgeons! Command *thou*, where *I*

may command no more, and God prosper the first and last blow thou shalt strike for King William ! Tyrant though, in some sort, he be, he is *my* Sovereign and *thine* ; and who knows, for as smooth and fair-spoken as Stephen now is, whether *he* would not speedily love gold and power, fines and reliefs, fat benefices, rich wardships, and a thousand miles of royal forestry, as well and dearly as ever yet did his conquering Uncle, or his red Cousin ? Tush ! words are air ! Get thee hence, Raymond, I say, if thou can'st. I give my honour and my pennon to thy keeping, until an angel, or De Albemarle, give me wings to fly too.—If that be a vain hope, and I must needs rot within stone walls, commend me to my King, dear youth, and bid God speed him for Alberic du Coci ! He comes, indeed, with a power that shall drive these rebels to bitter straits ; but I say nought of *rescue* ; for if my head be yet upon my shoulders when this castle-convent is invested, it will off *then* at least, with the first summons of trumpet ! and so much, dear Raymond, for the last splinter of the broken lance !”—

He ceased ; and Raymond made no answer, except by a grasp of his hand, while his own shook with bitter emotion.

Hours wore away, evening drew on ; at last came a summons for Raymond to the presence of De Mowbray.

“ Remember !” said the Knight.

And then, as those part who know not if they shall meet again—they parted.

CHAPTER X.

" —— O grace ! O heaven defend me !
Are ye a man ? have ye a soul or sense ?
God be with you ! take mine office. O wretched Fool !
That liv'st to make thine honesty a vice !
O monstrous world ! take note, take note, O world !
To be direct and honest is not safe !
I thank you for this profit ! ——"

Othello.

RAYMOND was conducted to a scene not the least trying of many he had undergone.

In a small chamber adjoining the convent-refectory, sat the powerful Noble so often mentioned in these pages, although now first brought before the reader.

Robert de Mowbray was a man in the prime of life ; at least upon the youthful side of forty ; and, both in form and face, might be considered eminently handsome, by those who have no quarrel with an expression of stern grandeur. He exceeded in stature every man in his earl-

dom ; and his whole frame, proportionably stout, was in every part so knit and moulded for athletic and martial toil, that a single glance told the boldest adversary to beware of lightly opposing him. Excessive darkness of complexion rather added to than diminished the haughty majesty of his large and noble features. It certainly enhanced the terrors of their general expression, and, together with coal-black hair of profuse growth, gave lustre to those fires of ambitious thought so continually flashing in his eye from the proud spirit within.

He sat in the streaming sunlight, by the narrow lattice, cased in complete mail, excepting only helmet and gauntlets ; and neither rose nor gave one look or gesture of kindly greeting to the person once so favoured and trusted, and who had undergone so many toils and trials in his service.

Could Raymond's spirit have quailed, it had done so now, before the glance which was bent upon him. But an indignant consciousness that its stern scrutiny was, at once, ungrateful and unjust, armed him to meet and endure it.

" At last," said De Mowbray, in calm but freezing tones—" thou art here."

" At last," repeated the youth, with the firm-

ness of offended pride—"I am indeed here. Late, yet, methinks, too soon."

"A riddle!" said his Lord. "Exound. My ear is dull."

"Not to the voice of slander," rejoined the Squire. "To *that*, Northumberland can listen. Where is my accuser?"

The Earl replied, and, indeed, maintained the whole conversation, in the calm cold accents of "great greatness" which scorns to betray a strong emotion to an inferior.

"Why, who or what hath told thee thou art accused?"

"*Within*," said Raymond, touching his breast, "nothing. *Without*, all things; all acts—all eyes—all tones. Neglect, where I had once observance. Scorn, where I had once greeting. Slight, where I had once command. Restraint, where I had once authority.—These! and thine own stern glance and accent."

"Pity!" said the Earl, in chilling sarcasm. "Bitter and undeserved return for truth like thine!"

"By TRUTH ITSELF!" said Raymond, "bitter and undeserved alike!"

"Take heed," said De Mowbray, "be not doubly accursed! Day and night the vasty ears

of hell listen for *perjury*! Treason and murder yoke with it; and, to *their* punishment, common damnation is as repose and peace—aye! as sweet sleep, compared!—Had'st thou a *charge*, good youth, when last we parted?"

"I had. And had fulfilled it, but for mishap and treachery."

"Right. *Mishap* and *treachery* are the words. *They* drew thee to seek companionship with my worst foes—De Waleric and Du Coci."

"I sought it not," said Raymond, "nor knew Du Coci for your foe until to-day, within these walls. And for De Waleric—friend or foe to whomsoever else——"

——— "Peace! Thou hast said!" interrupted the Earl; "spare falsehood that avails not."

"Falsehood!"

"Be still. I knew De Waleric, and his hate. The grave that hath him give him peace! I know *thee*, and thy faithlessness, and will now make brief the commerce betwixt us."

"Faithlessness!" exclaimed Raymond, half choked with the iteration; "falsehood! faithlessness!"

"They were my words, Sir Squire," said De Mowbray; "we must be plain in this new world.

I know thee faithless. I know thee for a traitor, and, ere this, had given thee a traitor's doom, but for the memory of *the past*, chiefly of the fight at Alnwick, where I forget not whose arm was once my shield. For *that* I owe thee life, and will repay it. Go ! thou art free. Life and dishonour be thy quittance ! But, *so repaid*, be wise, fair Sir, be wise. Cross not my path again !”

“ Can it be possible ! ” Raymond ejaculated ; “ Do I live and hear ? O world ! O man ! O gratitude ! False ! False to *thee* ! Traitor ! Just heaven ! If this be known, Truth and Loyalty shall sicken to do service save to God only ! Show me, injurious Earl ! *how* faithless ? *wherein* traitor ? Show me, upon what dim, faint shadow of evil seeming, thou, or the minion that hath lied to thee, the villain Paganel, could hang one poor suspicion of my truth ? ”

“ Brave orator ! ” said the Earl ; “ *thus* did’st thou vaunt and mouth, at Winchester, to Hugh-le-Loup ; widening the breach of love thou should’st have toiled to heal ! Thus, too, to the Damoiselle Matilda, when, upon bended knee, thou should’st have sued to her as for a thousand lives ! But *not thus*, good Raymond, to the tyrant King, when thou wert graced with

secret sittings in his royal closet, to sell, for the fitting price, thy Lord—thy truth—thy faith—thy whole dishonoured self, body and soul ! No ! then—*then*, methinks, thou would’st be *calm*. Aye ! and most *frank*, withal ; they that bargain with a King keep not, for nice regards, the counsels of others—*they tell all*. But I had eyes in Winchester—other eyes than Torfin Paganel’s—that tracked thee with the disguised King over his castle moat. Enough. I know thy traffic with him ; and all the jugglery of the forest-tilting devised by him and thee. Go ! I know thee. But thou art free and safe.”

Surprise, sorrow, resentment, insulted integrity, the sense of hasty condemnation, of ill-requited attachment (for none had ever approached De Mowbray with the same personal warmth)—all these rushed upon Cœur d’Acier with such violence that each, in turn, seemed to neutralise its fellow. At last indignation became the master-feeling, and he made answer :

“ It is enough. I am schooled ! Thou hast taught me, great Earl, the wisdom of long toil for others—of faith—of self-devotion—of the thought by day and the dream by night for mortal man ! One question and I depart, little

thanking thee for thy boon of life. ‘The Lady Constance—doth *she*, too, hold me guilty?’”

At these words, something flashed across the countenance of De Mowbray which no ordinary emotion ever gave it; and he replied with as much of passion as the guarded coldness of his nature allowed.

“ Presumptuous fool! tempt me not by *that* name to resume my gift of mercy! Get hence; but mark! thou, who art become a lover of courts, shalt have a courtly dismissal! I will do thee grace for the last time.”

He rang a small silver hand-bell, and, bidding those who attended conduct the youth to the great hall, disappeared himself by another door.

Raymond was ushered with mock form into the refectory or great eating-hall of the convent, now fitted up both for council and banqueting chamber, with as much of regal show and state as haste permitted. It seemed, at present, to be used for the latter purpose, and was thronged with persons in rich half-military habits; some sitting at the *dais* or chief table, elevated above the rest of the floor; and others at inferior boards. At the upper end of the former, under a purple canopy, upon a throne of a few steps,

sat Stephen of Albemarle. Two vacant seats were upon his right; beyond which sat the portly Hugh-le-Loup—"a Lord," as Chaucer says, "full fat, and in good point;" the gay and gallant Sir Ilbert de Tunbridge; the goodly person of Abbot Baldwin; and many dignitaries whose names have not descended to us. Upon the left, but close to the throne, Raymond saw with dazzled and confused eyes—and, oh! how changed since they last met! Constance de Mowbray!

Yes! she lived—the blast had been "tempered to the shorn lamb," and she sat in her father's halls, dragged to life and present safety from the waves of ocean and the stormier passions of man. The commands of Earl Robert had summoned her from her needful couch to the festal board; and she sat without a word or a motion—almost without one symptom of life, cold and pale as a statue fresh wrought.

Presently, De Mowbray entered, leading by the hand a Lady, veiled. They made an obeisance to the new Monarch, and then passed to the vacant seats upon his right, all present, except De Albemarle, rising and standing during the ceremonial.

"Welcome, our noble host!" said Stephen,

gaily, “we are here as guests untended; and thou art young in Chancellorship, or, having charge of a King’s conscience, wouldest scantily leave him to the perils of the wine-cup, after escape from chambers where the brine of ocean was his best cheer.”

“Pardon, my Liege,” said the Earl—“they that be young in office make (as the proverb hath it)

‘ Of a light toil
A heavy coil.’

I have been busied *with a King’s emissary*; and could not choose but give him ear and answer.”

“We do perceive;”—said De Albemarle, glancing with a jocular significance at the veiled Lady, “an emissary of King Cupid! Heaven save and keep his gentle Majesty in *this* realm at least!”

“Say, rather,” cried De Mowbray—filling and raising a goblet—“an emissary of King William—Heaven save and keep the realm of England from him and his! pledge me to *that*, my lords!”

He drank, and the daring toast was indeed pledged with an enthusiasm which marked at least the *unanimity* of the guests.

When the tumult subsided, De Mowbray raised the Lady and withdrew her veil. It is scarcely necessary to add that the features revealed were those of Matilda de Aquila, or that a buzzing murmur of admiration arose on every hand; for, besides the sure homage to the chosen of the great, there was, no doubt, a genuine tribute to her beauty, which never appeared more splendid than now, even in the presence of one who generally threw all competition into shadow. But, of *three* persons present, it might be difficult to say to whom the surprise was most perfect and painful.—To the love-sick Sir Ilbert de Tunbridge, who in a moment saw the issue of *his* passion and suit—to Raymond, heart-stung by the calumnies he doubted not *she* had contributed to forge or foster—or to Constance, who remembering the veiled lady of Nunna Mynstre, saw in her re-appearance under *such* auspices a long perspective of fresh trials.

“ My Liege and Peers !” resumed De Mowbray, “ there is amongst us a minion of that Red Tyrant who swore of late to give *this* hand” (raising Matilda’s) “ to whomsoever of his meanest slaves should strike off the head of Robert de Mowbray.” My Lord of Chester, (turning to Hugh-le-Loup) “ was it not thus sworn ?”

"By our Lady of Bangor, yes!" answered the Marchman.

"Then, noble Hugo," resumed the Northern Earl, "Guardian of Matilda de Aquila, say! hast thou freely and truly given her to *my* hand, with sole proviso of the Royal sanction?"

"I have."

"My gracious Liege! hast thou, as Guardian-Paramount of England, freely and truly given to *my* hand the Damoiselle Matilda de Aquila, daughter of the dead Richerius de Aquila, niece of Hugh Lupus, Earl of Chester—with sole proviso of my truth and fealty?"

"I have."

"Lady! hast thou freely and truly given heart and hand to Robert de Mowbray?"

"I have."

"Prior of Tynemouth! holy servant of God, St. Mary, St. Oswyn, and St. Alban! hast thou, by solemn rites of Mother Church, given for ever to *my* hand the hand of Matilda de Aquila?"

"I have!" replied the deep voice of the Prior; and by this strange form De Mowbray gave the first appraisal of his marriage, which had, in fact, been privately celebrated two days before.

Then, striding to where Raymond stood with burning cheek, he said, smiling in bitter triumph,

"*Thus much* thou hast in embassy from me!—who else"—he added, "would now send greeting to the Tyrant, under favour of my Liege, may speak. *My* say is said."

"And, by St. George! *well* said!" exclaimed De Albemarle. "Look, noble Peers! I crown this goblet, and crave to be pledged right joyously by all, to the dear health of the Bride, our lovely Hostess, Matilda, erst of Aquila, now Countess of Northumberland!"

A hundred goblets were drained—an acclaiming shout went through the hall, and De Mowbray, bowing with proud humility, returned his thanks to the Sovereign.

"I thank *thee*, noble Earl!" returned the latter, when silence was restored, "for teaching me this form of embassy! mark how I profit by it."

He turned to Constance. She seemed neither to observe the action, nor to hear his words.—He raised her hand—it lay in his, cold, unresisting, unreplying. He looked in her bloodless face, and would have desisted, had a graceful retreat been possible. But it was too late.

"Another oath," he said aloud, "our tyrant cousin of Winchester hath sworn, if report speak sooth. He hath sworn to give *this* hand, the

hand of Constance de Mowbray, to whomsoever of his minions shall win back for him the New Castle upon Tyne, now held and garrisoned for us. Earl of Northumberland, is it not so rumoured?"

"They that *heard*, my liege," said De Mowbray, "attest it."

"Then, noble Robert, Sire and Guardian of this lovely one, dost thou (to use thine own form and phrase) freely and truly give her to me, Stephen, erst of Albemarle, thy Friend and Prince, with sole proviso that she be crowned Queen of England when victory hath once given us free pathway to the throne?"

"With full, and joyous, and most loyal heart!" was the reply.

The regal suitor then turned once more to the Lady—but dared not carry further what he had begun! He saw that her eye had at length fallen upon Raymond, and that it glanced from him she loved to him whom she *did not*, with a fire resembling insanity. He saw that even the dreaded frown of De Mowbray availed nothing against the speaking gaze of Cœur d'Acier, and that, regardless of all things else, she continued to meet *that* gaze

"With look of answering sympathy and love."

It cost him a fearful effort to become “a most princely hypocrite,” and *smile* away his embarrassment. But pride and necessity prevailed. He motioned her to withdraw—turned to the assemblage, and said *smilingly*,

“ A maiden’s whispered ‘ Yes ’ is for the chosen ear. Away, Sir Envoy ! if such thou art ; report to William the Red what thou hast witnessed, and bid him look that his crown be fast, or ere the world be many days older, we will rend it from his temples !”

“ Tell him,” said the Earl of Chester, “ that Hugh-le-Loup ‘ with his gross body ’ will keep well his parting word—he will ‘ *meet him with all his power.* ’ ”

“ Tell him,” said the now doubly disgusted Knight of the Falcon, (not sorry to convey his cause of disgust to those around, whom he felt had equally deceived him,) “ that Ilbert de Tunbridge, with a thousand lances, will thank him ere long for the promised *Bride* he wots of.”

“ Tell him,” said the martial Abbot Baldwin, “ that, with our Lady’s grace, Baldwin of Tynemouth will teach him anon to do scorn to Mother Church, by simony ; and grasping of vacant benefices ; and by compelling of holy men to thrust their mortified bodies into unholly mail, to

strike with the carnal weapon instead of the axe canonical. Tell him that our once silent cloisters are now as courts of guard; and our once solemn towers as the high places of a fenced city! That I have changed my dalmatique for a hauberk, and my crozier for a lance; and that I and my monks will gird up our loins and do battle against him lustily, although we perish as the twelve hundred Saints of Bangor by the hands of the Heathen Ethelfred; or as those whom the blessed Alwyn led to the gory field of Hastings. Tell him, if thou wilt, that ‘a sword is sharpened, and furbished, and given into the hand of the slayer.’—That ‘Hell is naked before him and hath no covering!’”

So ran the bravado of the military Monk, and it was applauded to the very echo by his warlike hearers.

“Now, get thee hence,” said De Mowbray. “Fly to thy new lord with a swift wing, lest his own be stricken before thou join’st him! and deep and far may he trust thee, that thou may’st as far and deeply betray him! For the beloved Alberic du Coci, tell *thy* Master, and *his*, that when ye have marched within the range of our catapults, I will fling the marauding villain’s head into the midmost of your camp. Ho!

tend this gallant forth ! give him safe conduct to the barriers, but let him speak with none. *Away, Traitor !*"

The spirit of Raymond had, by this, broken through the last lingering ties of early feeling, which, up to this point, restrained him. The last drop had fallen into the brimmed cup, and his whole outraged heart boiled over at last in passionate speech.

" Yes !" he exclaimed, in tones which rang through the wide hall—placing himself at the same time so as to confront the whole gazing and listening throng—

" Yes ! I go ! I leave thy convent-castle, proud ingrate ! *Castle*, where there is no truth in man—*Convent*, where there is no honour to God ! I leave it as I would leave a house of pest—I fly from it as honesty and faith fly from the robber's den—the rebel's haunt ! Deal with Alberic du Coci as thou canst, or *darest* ! He would despise me did I make prayer for him.—I have served thee, haughty Earl ! as never before did young or old ! I have made my bosom thy shield ; I have shut thy counsel in it as in a chest trebly barred—and this is my requital ! But my last words shall be those of the Primate Anselm, when in *my* ear he denounced thee for

dishonour done to this very house ! ‘ Tell De Mowbray of Northumberland, that even under the holy roof he hath defiled shall the finger of chastisement be upon him ! ’ — Now, helpless, ruined, scorned, and solitary, I depart, but— Beware of my return ! ”

Thus saying, he turned, like the faithful Abdiel—

“ Among the faithless faithful only he ! ”

And, in his excessive beauty of person, his fervour of just resentment, and solitary defiance of numbers, Raymond looked no unworthy impersonation of the great Poet’s youthful Seraph abandoning the rebel-spirits. Of all who were thus defied, not one attempted either to answer or restrain him, and with this impunity,

“ ————— from midst them forth he pass’d
Long way through hostile scorn ; which he sustained
Superior, nor of violence feared aught ;
And, with retorted scorn, his back he turned
On those proud towers ! ————— ”

CHAPTER XI.

"Away now with the scabbard ! War's let loose—
My stirrup shall give law ! Revenge !
Full, swift, and bloody !——"

Croly's Catiline.

"—— To the ramparts all !
Quick ! load the engines ! let the archers shoot !
Whirl slings—rain lances—give them steel i' the teeth !
Fight all, as if upon his single arm
Each bore the whole high fortunes of the night !"

Ibid.

FOR the present, we leave the incensed Raymond in full flight to wheresoever his now broken fortunes seemed to call him, and remain with the revellers of Tynemouth.

They spent a graver interval in council, and upon the battlements; and there the valiant Prior, (full of the defiance he had hurled against the King,) lectured, alternately, upon fortification and church government; upon the atrocity of vacant benefices, and the beauty of a mangonel which would throw its shot a thousand yards. He proved, also, as they passed along the walls

and towers, how ill-fitted was the situation of Tynemouth for the devotions of Godly men ; the Abbey being, as he classically expressed himself, “*nimas religiosus, horridus et incultus,*” perched upon a hideous precipice, nodding over a tumultuous shore. He owned, indeed, that the terrors of the rocky coast, and, in especial, those that lay, in grim watch for mariners, around the mouth of the river, might, occasionally, in storms and heavy gales, promote pious thoughts and holy purposes of dedicating candles and candlesticks to St. Oswyn ; but that, in reality, few—very few of these irrevocable vows were ever performed, seeing that (even in those days) sailors were the same jolly and light-hearted reprobates they have almost always turned out ; and rarely fulfilled the good promises of their worst hours of danger, because (in accordance with a joke of latter times) they *could not*, if they were drowned, and *would not*, if they were saved.

He then shifted his position, and with something of worldly vain glory, pointed out the extent of the Abbey walls, the beauty of their elaborately adorned Church, and the solemn grandeur of all their offices ; not forgetting to enumerate the villas, and the lands, and the tithes ; the

impropriations, the advowsons, the messuages, the fairs, the markets, and heaven knows what other god-sends of temporalities, which had, all and sundry, been confirmed by royal charter to “his *poor house*.”

But the happiest and most fertile theme of his eloquence, was the admirable situation of Tynemouth for the purposes of castellated defence.

“Ah! benedicite, my children!” he exclaimed, “if our fathers or forefathers had built them here, and upon such other beetling bases, goodly castles, with towers, and battlements, and munition, and needful engines, like to these around us; rather than holy churches, in which, oftentimes, they that chaunt the anthem may halloo until their windpipes crack, ere one screamer heareth the voice of another, for the loud bellowing of wind and wave, like unto a thousand bulls of Bashan, along this monstrous shore; I say, my brethren, (my children I would say) had they been wise to build them *stout castles*, then, never had the blood-thirsty heathen, the pagan Dane, sailed in fierce triumph up Tyne and Wear; and, again, when they had burnt, and slain, and plundered, betaken them to sea, booty-laden, as pert and blythsome as though they had done a courtesy and a grace

to the land, and were departing with God's benizon and the King's!—I promise ye, my Masters!" (he added, forgetting his canonical epithets as he waxed warmer), "with but a brace or two of Catapults, and a Trebuchet, I would have so mauled and peppered the Giant Harfager's five hundred barks of Norway, when he sailed between these headlands in the days of Saxon Harold, that, by St. Herebald! the Pagan Dog should have thought the very rocks themselves were flung upon his knaves' pates! Oh! commend me to huge stones* that crush the iron-pot of the valiant into the brain-pan, and the mailed limbs of the proud into gory mammocks!"

And, in the rapture of his panegyric, he

* We really do not know whether the worthy Abbot was a votary of the Muses as well as of Mars and St. Benedict, but the least hint of such an addiction would have induced us to ascribe to him (notwithstanding a difference of two or three centuries in date), that curious old poem in which such a sounding stave is lifted up to the praise and glory of great stones in warfare; for example—

" Use eke the cast of stone wyth slynge or honde,
 It falleth ofte, yf other shotte ther none is,
 Men harneySED in steel may not wylstonde
 The multitude and myghty caste of stonès!
 And stonès, in effect, are every where—

* * * *

flourished the iron *wince* of a Balista with an air of great gusto, and looked as though it would have delighted his heart to hurl a ton or two of ragged limestone into the first unhappy boat that, as the phrase went, “came within his danger,” only just by way of practical illustration !

De Albemarle, who stood near, but apart, upon an angle of the seaward parapet, listened with amused complacency to the soldier-priest. To him it was “ a feeling disquisition.” He exulted in the security of a fortress which commanded so fine a river at the entrance, while the only bridge for some miles along its course was, in like manner, “ over-crowed” by Newcastle, or, as we have hitherto more distinctively termed it, “ *the* New Castle ;” a strength manned also by his adherents.

In spite of the chill thrown over him by the coldness, if not aversion, of Constance, his “ bosom’s lord ” began to “ sit lightly on his throne ; ” and he looked around him with that ambitious swelling of the heart proper to one who trusts soon to call the whole round of earth and ocean that he surveys, his own. The sun was more than half down ; the beach below already half in twilight, and the long shadows of the cliff and convent swept far over the waves.

But, upon the dancing waters beyond, and the embattled walls above, the lingering radiance streamed with a contrasted glory, that, to a poet, or a moralist, might well have suggested the trite image of scarcely-separated human joy and sorrow—the sun-light and the shadow of mortal life. De Albemarle felt it thus, and, looking where the billows broke upon Marston Headland, thought of the dark caverns in which those seeming playful waters had, but a few hours before, threatened to silence him and his ambitious hopes for ever! Now, the rich evening light, and the pure breath of its summer heaven, were upon him; ocean, and vast walls, and a gallant army, girdled him in; and the repast which awaited him in Tynemouth might be the speedy precursor of a banquet in the palace halls of Winchester or London!

While these flattering dreams prevailed, a few tones of a harp awoke near him, and, advancing in their direction, he saw that a minstrel had placed himself where the ears of the new monarch might listen to his strain. It was rude and wild, but as the transition even to *dull rhyme* may afford *some* relief to the reader, we venture to transcribe the “*Lay*” sung by the minstrel on Tynemouth battlements.

THE DEMON'S ISLE.

1.

O blythely, blythely sped the bark
That Saxon Eadmer bore,
With his fair-hair'd bride, in her beauty's pride,
From Bamborough's kingly shore !
But the storm-fiend came in cloud and flame,
And the surges whelmed them o'er !
And a Demon fired a beacon red
O'er his isle of terror glaring,
Whose shore was spread with stranded dead
For the famish'd sea-birds' tearing !

2.

Slowly, slowly the pale dawn crept
From the dark embrace of night ;
The storm was hushed and the wild winds slept,
Save a murmuring breeze that lightly swept
A raft o'er the surges white.
Sir Eadmer there, with his Lady fair,
For weary life were striving ;
And the burdened mast on the current fast
To the Demon's Isle was driving !

3.

Sadly, sadly, o'er paths unblessed,
They passed with foot-steps sore ;
O'er tangled wilds that ne'er were pressed
By mortal foot before.
The wild-dog howled, and the she-wolf growled,
The wanderers' hearts dismaying,
And the serpent rolled his scaly fold
Where their lonely feet were straying !

4.

Deadly, deadly nightshade arched
 The path of the hapless pair,
 And thirst and hunger gnawed and parched,
 But fount nor food was there !
 Alone the fruit of that poisonous root
 In the dim drear woods was growing,
 And many a snake hissed loud in the brake
 Where the lonely stream was flowing !

5.

Darkly, darkly fell the shade
 Of night on the Demon's Isle,
 His lady's couch Sir Eadmer made
 Where a withering fir o'erhung the glade,
 And he vow'd with sleepless eye and blade
 To watch around the while.
 " I'll hurl the wolf in yon craggy gulf,
 If near thy slumbers prowling,
 And the serpent shall start and glide apart,
 To hear the savage howling ! "

6.

Fatally, fatally Eadmer drank
 Of the deadly dew as it fell ;
 Till in slumbers deep his eye-lids sank,
 O'er-power'd with a magic spell !
 At the raven's croak, with a start he woke,
 His flesh with terror creeping—
 And he softly stept where his lady had slept—
 But he found no lady sleeping !

7.

Wildly, wildly, o'er rock and steep,
 Then hurried the phrenzied knight,
 With many a curse on his treacherous sleep,
 And many a curse, more dread and deep,
 On the treacherous elfin-sprite !

Up started then from his gloomy den
 The fiend in his anger proudly—
 “I care not for ban of a perjured man !”
 He cried to Sir Eadmer loudly !—

8.

Boldly, boldly Sir Eadmer’s brow
 He crossed, then hallowed his blade—
 Cried “Holy Virgin ! O, help me now !”
 And cleft down the elfin-shade !—
 With an eldritch scream, like a fading dream,
 The grisly shape departed ;
 And his lady dear, from the cavern drear,
 To his eager bosom started !

9.

Gaily, gaily carols the lark
 At the smile of the rising morn,
 And gaily, gaily speeds a bark,
 O’er the ocean surges borne !
 Sir Eadmer there, and his Lady fair
 A boundless joy’s pervading,
 And the Demon’s Isle from their ken the while
 Far, far o’er the billow is fading !

De Albemarle drew nearer to the Minstrel.
 “Art thou a Saxon ?” he said.
 “I was, my Liege,” said the Man of Song.
 “Thou *wast* ? why, what art now ?”
 “Nothing. But I would fain be anything
 that best pleases your Grace.”
 “Thou art a courtier already,” said De Albemarle.—“Dost know the Saxon Wolfsic ?”

“The pale?”

“Pale or black—Wolfsic *the devil*, I mean !
Dost wot of such ?”

“I have seen and heard of him, my Liege ;
and can both say and sing somewhat of Se-
Blaca :—but it were ill-fitting your Norman
—I would say your *royal* ear.”

“Make me mine own judge of that,” replied Stephen, “and *say* not ; but give me *song* ;
for, if the *matter* be ungracious, ‘tis doubly so
lacking both time and tune.”

“Aye, but—my Liege——”

“Thy song, varlet ! and bandy not *but* or *if*
with me ! if it be a song of *Satan* thou shalt
have both pardon and largesse !”

BALLAD.

WOLFSIC THE PALE.

1.

Lo ! Wolfsic Se-Blaca comes down in the vale,
With the foam on his steed, and the rust on his mail ;
He rides not with buckler—he rides not with lance,
But his heart is as strong, and as piercing his glance !
And hauberk and helm may as stoutly avail
'Gainst the arrows of Death as of Wolfsic the Pale !

2.

Wolfsic the Pale has no page at his call,
For his slumbers no couch, for his courser no stall

He rushes afar with no store for his lack,
 No purse at his saddle, no squire at his back !
 Yet the boldest and proudest in surcoat and mail
 May fly from the bow-craft of Wolfsic the Pale !

3.

Though the trumpet of war hath forgotten to speak,
 There are spots on his blade, there are scars on his cheek,
 There are shrieks in the valley, and groans on the hill,
 And curses on Wolfsic are echoing still !
 Yet the fieriest gallant may tremble and quail
 'Ere he ride to avenge them on Wolfsic the Pale !

4.

The Lord of high Ratcheough his vengeance averred,
 And forty bold vessels rode forth at his word ;
 But the sharp spur of Wolfsic was dashed in his steed,
 Like lightning his eye, and like lightning his speed !
 The deep foss to swim, and the high walls to scale,
 And the Norman to slay, was for Wolfsic the Pale !

5.

There's a Chief of the proud ones laid low in his blood,
 There are smouldering heaps where his proud turrets stood ;
 And the maid and the matron may sorrow in vain,
 For the dreadless AVENGER hath swept o'er the plain.
 And the might of the Norman shall never avail
 'Gainst the bow and the shaft of stern Wolfsic the Pale !

" I thank thee. Take thy largesse," said De Albemarle, " and, when I have *hanged* this boasted Se-Blaca, thou shalt sing me a lay thereon, at the gallow's foot. Go."

Soon after, the Banqueting Chamber was

again filled. The rere-supper was splendidly served. The wine cup again mantled; and the spirits of the revolutionists rose rapidly to their highest pitch. Every one declaimed furiously against the tyranny of William and his Minister; recapitulated broken oaths and promises; and cited acts of oppression, and statutes that ground all ranks from the baron to the serf. All were furiously patriotic. All regarded themselves as dreadfully injured, and seemed determined to be as dreadfully revenged. All were angry, fluent, sanguine, resolute; and fully convinced, although they knew not how, that the law of primogeniture was absurd, and the Conqueror's *nephew* quite as eligible to the throne as his *son*. The enthusiasm of their loyalty to De Albemarle was in exact ratio to their abhorrence of Rufus. He was "the rascalliest sweet young prince!" in every one's estimation who had his clutch upon a goblet of rich wine; and, even at the lowest boards, where double ale was the preferred beverage, oaths and protestations flaggon-wide and black-jack deep, were as plentiful as flowers in spring. Upon the part of the new Monarch all was in the usual magniloquent, promissory vein. The grinding tyranny of the forest statutes—the exaction of *moneyage* and

fines, the grievances of *wardships* and *reliefs*; the retention or simoniacal disposal of benefices; in fact *all* political sores and maladies were to be healed for ever in the restored body-politic of the Commonwealth. Even the wretched English were at length to pick up the dropped crumbs from their Master's table, without being spurned from under it like dogs; and the golden age of government was to be restored in England under a Monarch of the people's own choice, who, like Shakspeare's "King Gon-salvo" should cause "all foizon and abundance without sweat or endeavour—abolish poverty and occupation, treason and felony, and make all his 'innocent subjects' equally happy and pure." So, at least, by interpretation *sub-vino*, ran the convivial manifesto of King Stephen; and, in the sanguine spirit it generated or fostered, cities were taken and victories achieved, with more and more admirable facility at the brimming of every fresh goblet.

"My liege!" said a young Knight, starting from his seat, "what good at your royal hand shall *he* have who first brings news of the Tyrant's march?"

"Bonnet of Squirehood, if a Yeoman," said Stephen; "Spur and Baldric, if a Squire—and

if a Knight, I will cut square his pennou.* God grant it be claimed speedily!"

"Methinks," said the Earl of Northumberland, "Reginald de Lacy hath taken *that* quest; for here he tarried not after a single goblet, but leapt to saddle and away; malgre his drenched gambeson and hose. Armour, if I beheld aright, he had none."

"The poor fish," said De Albemarle, "could not swim for his shell, in yonder coral grots. But I warrant him sped to the New Castle, where there is no lack of dark-eyed dainty ones for consolation."

This was the first of many jests upon the absent Lord of Newark, and little did the jesters dream how wide of the mark were all their facetious guesses as to his sudden absence. But, at length, came sober certainty; for, at a late hour, when the tide of mirth was at flood, and all had risen to retire in high heart and hope, Reginald de Lacy burst suddenly into the midst, faint, staggering, almost breathless, and with looks

* Gentle reader! "Ken ye ought o' Captin Greec?" if so, you may not require to be told that "on the performance of any gallant action, the Knight's Pennon was converted into a *Banner*, by the King or General, by cutting off the point. This raised the *Knight* to a *Bannerett*."

harmonizing as ill with all around as those of a mourner at a bridal-feast.

De Mowbray and De Albemarle, each grasping an arm, almost forced him into a seat, and both in one voice exclaimed—

“ Thy news !”

“ Evil !” he said, in a low tone, but with deadly emphasis—“ Dismiss these brawlers.”

De Mowbray gave a courteous signal of dispersion, and presently none remained but the chief actors.

“ Now,” he said, “ thy evil news.”

“ The New Castle is stormed and taken.” replied the Baron.

“ God for his mercy !” said De Albemarle—“ by whom ?”

“ Raymond of the Heart of Steel !” answered Reginald. “ So much for *sparing life* ! *He* hath spared little, I promise ye ! Two hundred men lie dead 'twixt keep and barbican !—Now, by the Mother of Heaven ! siege and battle, many a one have I seen, and laughed at the shedding of blood since my years were twice seven ; but, as I live and breathe, I did never yet see mortal man fight like yonder incarnate Devil ! Oh, the curse of being out-wearied and well-nigh drowned ere a fray begin ! Twice

did we cross swords, and twice had I good help from my stout merrymen, or, by St. George, ere this I had been with those who tell no tales!"

"Thine is a *strange* tale," said Hugh-le-Loup—“Why, where hath *he* a power to storm a castle?"

"I cannot tell," said De Lacy; "I speak but what I have seen—(Give me a bowl of wine, I pray you!) Some say it was Du Coci's strength, others, the van of the Tyrant's army. But they had crossed the moat on hurdles; and there was a postern opened—treachery belike; I know not what, or how. One had arrived who swore to a great battle;—King William slain, and Stephen crowned; and there was nought but tossing of caps, and drinking of double healths. Alas! poor gulls! Watch and ward, when I arrived, were forgotten things! they had drowned them in jack and flaggon!"

De Albemarle struggled hard with chagrin and rage.

"*Thou*, Reginald de Lacy," he said, "art a brave man, and would'st bear thee full knightly, I doubt not. But for our Castellan De Morley——!"

"*Threaten*, my Liege," said the Baron, "that

he may live long.* 'Twill hardly be, else—*very* hardly, if ye retake him not before the power of the King be up. Meanwhile, he is safe from *your* vengeance, he and his whole garrison—but the Lord keep him from that of Rufus!"

De Mowbray's countenance was dreadful. No man ever saw him violent in action, or gesture, or heard a burst of passion from his lip,

" *Within, within, 'twas there the spirit worked.*"

But his brow became almost *literally* black, as he asked the brief question,

" Saw ye Torfin Paganel?"

" I did," answered De Lacy, " and so wilt thou never again!—*his* bolt is sped! *he* will never more carve to fair Lady, nor rivet a harness-clasp! I saw him fly from the avenging Raymond, as the hare flies from the hound! from stair to stair—from chamber to chamber—from turret to turret was the race; at last, upon the platform of the Keep—and *there*, from whence flight was none, save to Heaven above, or Hell beneath, *there* did the quarry turn to bay; and *there* they fought, and closed, and grappled, and tugged, as ye have seen two mastiffs! In brief, as your Grace's cousin, Henry

* Allusion to a Northern proverb.

of Aquitain, dealt with the rebel Conan in Roan, so dealt the fiery Raymond with Torfin. He hurled him sheer over the battlements, and dashed his wretched body to shapelessness upon the stones beneath ! So much for Torfin Paganel!"——

"And so much," cried De Albemarle, "for our trust in the New Castle ! What then ? must we look pale for that ? and creep to bed, like stricken boys, crest-fallen ?"

"Not for the taking of a hundred towers !" cried De Mowbray — "We must amend the evil. Come ! be of cheer—'tis but a vexing scratch, no killing maim. We are of strength to meet the tyrant in the field. This night, sleep they who will or can—*my* couch shall be my saddle."

"And mine !" said Stephen. "I light a clearer, steadier torch of Hope at thy brave spirit. It is well, too, by St. Mary, that the noble Reginald hath escaped."

"Marry, for mine own part," said the Baron, "I had the grace to cut my way forth ; but if I can tell ye *how*, or through what gate or postern, strangle me ! There was nought for it but cleaving down, and thrusting through."

"Look !" said Earl Robert, "I will have

Alberic Du Coci led beneath the walls ; and threaten to wash his eyes with molten lead, and, after, tear his heart out, if they redeem him not by surrender, and that speedily !—Didst thou break forth alone, De Lacy ?”

“ Mary-mother, no !” said the Baron. “ I had help and comradeship from a remnant of my own varlets—would they had been more to resist, or fewer to yield ! for I can tell ye the fairer half are in limbo.”

“ *That* craves but little dole,” said De Albermarle. “ A poor handful, albeit of stout knaves—but, at the worst, what hope to take again by storm what storm hath taken ?”

“ First and chiefly,” said Earl Mowbray,—“ What of our prime foe ? What of the red-haired Tyrant ?”

“ This,” said De Lacy—“ from a jaded courier, who passed us hurrying northward upon the bloody spur, Rufus is at the gates of Durham, full twenty thousand strong.”

“ Strong let him be,” said De Mowbray, “ and stronger by five thousand more ! we may upon him with good heart. Our battle will shew heavier muster, if De Vesco make but timely head at Alnwick.”

“ Aye ! but ye know not that,” said the Earl

of Chester ; “ and ye know not if the King’s twenty thousand include Montgomery with his western host.”

“ Grant that it doth not,—we will fight ere they can join ; and, if God give us victory, I warrant Montgomery from striking stroke afterwards ! I know not the hearts of others, but, for mine own part, *battle* for me, to-morrow !”

“ St. George for us and England !” cried Stephen,—“ that wish is mine. My heart is in mail and stirrup even now !”

“ And, verily,” said Prior Baldwin, “ *my* soul also scentheth the battle afar off ! It is eager to cry ‘ ha ! ha ! to the trumpets—to the thunder of the captains and the shouting ! ”

“ Aye, but fight not with broken staves ;” said Hugh-le-Loup. “ De Vesco’s power is a main limb of our preparation, and we shall make lame march upon King Rufus if it be lacking.”

“ Credit me, noble Lupus,” said De Mowbray, “ it is not so. Better De Vesco absent and Rufus fought, ere he draw levies from Newcastle, than wait for strength from Alnwick until the Tyrant have taken Durham, and, it may be, crossed both Tyne and Wear, commanding, as he then will, the bridges of both streams.”

“ Right, past a doubt !” said De Lacy—“ In God’s name, say that we will fight to-morrow, and there an end ; for, methinks, if we debate long, and I sleep not away this aching of my toiled bones, a lad of twelve shall hurl me from the saddle with a sheep crook.”

“ Sleep and be strong, good Reginald !” said De Mowbray—“ I will have heed that thou art roused by second cock-crow. Ho, there ! a chamberlain !”

“ Nay,” said the Baron, with rather abated cheer, “ Hubert and De Belchamp, my stout squires, shall watch in my chamber. It is a foolish wont of mine in strange beds—I *have ill dreams*, and arise, sleeping, and walk in them. Good night, my Liege and Lords !”

“ Good night, and happy dreams of to-morrow !” was the reply.

“ To-morrow be it,” said the Earl of Chester ; adding, however, “ but it will *not* be. Credit me, Earl of Northumberland, thou can’t not draw to head in so brief time.”

“ Why, then, the next day,” said Northumberland, “ and ’tis, indeed, somewhat of the briefest ; for we must needs draw levies from the castles northward. Meanwhile, choose ye, my Liege, Tynemouth or Bamborough ? for

thither, in thy charge or mine; Constance and Matilda must away at early dawn, since neither may we follow Rufus northward, nor *he us*,—leaving them in the rear. Say, then, wilt thou to Bamborough, or tarry here in Tynemouth?

“In Tynemouth, I!” said the Earl, “lest it be said the new King loves not to face the old. And thou, too, noble Robert, knowest best what troops to pick for the field and what to leave for castle-guard.”

Thus saying and agreeing, they parted for the night. Scouts and couriers were then dispatched. The warders were doubled on the battlements; and while the other heads of the rebellion slept, or strove to sleep, De Mowbray and the Prior walked the rounds from barrier to barrier, arranging, in the little interval thus allowed, their final plan of defence and co-operation.

“And need is there,” said the warlike Churchman, “that we watch the way, and keep the munition, and make the sword sharp and the spear ready; for he that dasheth in pieces will come up, and will make a fort, and cast a mount, and lift up the buckler, and set engines of war against us; and with all his axes shall he strive to break down our gates. Now, by

the jaw-bone of Samson and the ox-goad of Shamgar the son of Anath ! I would that I, even I, unworthy as I am, might deal with this fat tyrant of England as Ehud the son of Gera dealt with Eglon the fat king of the Moabites, when he slew him with a dagger of a cubit long and having two edges ! Verily, I would run upon him as a giant, and defile his horn in the dust ! ”

CHAPTER XII.

They went on board, the wind with speed
Blew them along the deep ;
At length they spied a huge square tower
On a rock full high and steep.
The sea was smooth, the sky was blue ;
As they approached nigher,
King Ida's castle they well knew,
And the banks of Bamboroughshire.

The "Laidley Worm of Spindleston Heugh."

ALL night long the sound of defensive preparations were heard in the courts, and along the vast walls of Tynemouth ; and, with the first pale light of dawn, the warder upon the highest turret sent his keen glance on every side, over land and sea, to mark the approach of either friend or foe. But all was quiet and peaceful ; the lifeless quiet of sterility—the sullen peace of desolation—of abandoned homes and forgotten tillage. So dreadful in every part of Northumberland had been the ravages of the first William, when, with fire and sword, he avenged

himself for the rebellious spirit of its inhabitants ! Nearly a hundred thousand of these unhappy beings perished, as well by famine as the sword, after feeding upon the horses abandoned by the Normans, and even upon human flesh. “ It was a fearful spectacle,” says an old annalist, “ to see upon the roads and public ways, and at the doors of the houses, human bodies left a prey to the worms ; *for there was no one left to throw a little earth upon them!* ” The whole extended tract between the Tyne and the Ouse, a district of sixty miles, once full of towns and cultivated fields, was now silent and barren, the refuge only of wild beasts and robbers. Such were the tender mercies of the Normans.

The warder of Tynemouth saw nothing beyond his own walls that indicated life, except a distant sail or two hanging between sea and sky ; a few boats upon the Tyne, just discernible through the blue haze that tracked its windings, and a little smoke over the wretched fishing village of Shields, and in the direction of “ the New Castle,” and of the sister monasteries of Jarrow and Weremouth. Not then was “ the black banner of science” flung abroad to every point of the heavens ; the eye rested upon no masses of huge enginry, uttering at measured

intervals their volcanic belchings. No trains of sable carriages shot along their metallic paths with the level directness and almost with the speed of arrows. The earth was not ransacked for hundreds of subterranean miles by the busy hand of mining speculation, and her bituminous treasures, destined to form the wealth of future thousands, to raise large towns, and freight innumerable fleets, slept undisturbed, if not unknown,* in their pitchy depths.

At an early hour, according to a resolution of the previous night, De Mowbray embarked his lovely Countess and more lovely daughter for Bamborough. They left the monastery with little attendance, and by a secret postern, that nothing bearing the appearance of flight might be suggested to the garrison ; while a vessel lay ready in Prior's Haven to receive them. Passing down to the beach, Matilda was conducted by her Lord ; Constance, by one in knightly attire, but so masked and muffled as to defy recognition. He lost no moment, however, in addressing her.

" I have greetings for the Lady Constance," he said, " from one who knows not, in this

* Not unknown certainly. Even the Romans had worked coal by the Tyne.

stormy day, if he may ever more pay greeting to one so dear."

How ready is the heart to be deceived, as well as to deceive! The image of Raymond flashing upon her at the instant, she turned to the speaker with such a gesture of listening eagerness, as, perhaps, betrayed to him her misconstruction, for he added abruptly, and in undisguised accents—

"*The King, Lady, commends him to thee.*"

"*My King,*" she said, with the recovered coldness of disappointment, "sends *no* greeting to the Daughter of Northumberland; and, tell the Earl of Albemarle, if thou art Knight of his, that he is yet no Sovereign to Constance de Mowbray."

"Heartless girl!" exclaimed Stephen, "I have loved thee with a passion to which all others—even ambition itself, are but as leaves and straws to the whirl-blast! to which all objects else are but as clay to diamonds! I have nursed this dream of Kingship chiefly for thee, to fix a crown upon thy brow—to see thee great and feared, as thou art loved and lovely! At this price did thy father's ambition set thee, and for this have I staked life and fame, and toiled to the dizzy peak from whence there is no

descent, save falling headlong. Yet but a few hours, and the host of the tyrant Rufus will be upon us, and thou—thou wilt pray for its success—for victory to him whose conquering step must be upon thy father's neck and mine ! Mine, who would have bought thy love with the sovereignty of the whole earth?"

" No !" replied the Lady, " my knee shall not bend—my hand shall not rise—my heart shall vent no wish, in orisons for victory to either host ! To HIM who is the God of Battles and of Empire, I leave the issue ! If ruin and defeat await thee, Stephen of Albemarle, I will give thee a sister's tears for her defeated brother ; for I have seen, or fancied, in thee, flashes of nobleness and generous thought. If thou returnest a conqueror, remember my last words in Se-Blaca's cavern—words which thou shouldst take shame to wring again from my burning lip—*I love another.*"

" Let him beware of me !" said the exasperated Earl. " I guess at whom thou pointest—I guess the degraded minion whom *thou*, obdurate and perverse, shouldst take shame to weigh but in one moment's thought with Stephen of Albemarle ! Victor or vanquished—king or captive ! I will repay him ! I will mete him full measure

with heaped hand—his scorns to me—his treachery to thy father—his purchased crouching to the tyrant ! Know, Lady, that, for all this, De Mowbray, but yestereven, spurned him as a caitiff from his castle-hall ! and, for all this, let him but cross me in the coming battle, and I will spurn with my mailed foot upon this boasted ‘ Heart of Steel ! ’ ”

The heart of Constance became like the high Roman’s, “ too great for what contained it ! ”

“ O, braggart ! ” she exclaimed, “ traducing, slanderous braggart ! for, were they my last earthly words, and wert thou upon England’s throne to listen, so would I call thee ! Raymond do scorn to thee or thine ? He is all gentleness and courtesy ! Raymond *treacherous* ? He is the very soul of truth and honour ! Crouch for hire to tyranny ? I tell thee, Lord of Albemarle ! *thou*, nor *Rufus*, could *so* hire him, with an empire trebling that for which ye strive ! *Thou* spurn and trample upon the ‘ Heart of Steel ! ’ Go ! thou hast now given me cause, indeed, for prayer ! I will pray well that victory comes not near thee ! and if it be sooth that Raymond is in the host of his King, oh, may his lance be strong ! his sword be sharp ! and *He*, in whose hand is victory, clothe his charger’s neck with

thunder ! Thou hast seen him, with his single arm, cast the strongest of English chivalry from saddle and stirrup ; and, if I pray that, in the coming battle, he crosses not *thy* career, know, proud Earl, that it tenders *thy* safety—not his ! for that I would not thy blood should stain his lance.

“ Go !” she concluded, “ strive with *my* Sovereign for a crown to which *thine*, Robert of Normandy, is lawful heir, not *thou*, usurping Rebel ! Peril in thy unjust cause ten thousand lives, and win or lose as Heaven determines ! But I will show thee, Earl or King, that there is *one* ever-open door of freedom for Constance de Mowbray ! If thou art *worsted* in the fight, I pity thee ! If thou art *victor*, this hand may, indeed, be forced into *thine*, as I have heard that the crozier was forced into the Primate Anselm’s; but, from that hour, I swear by Heaven and Earth ! food nor drink—morsel nor drop, shall ever more pass these wretched lips !”

The spirit of De Albemarle was mastered—prince and warrior as he was, the bitter inspiration of passion made her eloquence and her beauty alike terrible to the minstrel and the lover ! He felt as if he could have cast himself in contrition at her very foot ! but Matilda was

already in the boat, and De Mowbray awaiting Constance on the beach. He could only utter a few confused words of expiating sorrow, and, without one of pardon or reply, or even a parting glance, saw her rowed off to the vessel which lay ready, with sloping yards in the offing. The favoured bark hoisted sail in a few minutes, and bore gallantly away, with a brisk south-west breeze setting fair in all her canvass.

Our motto, the good old ballad-verse of Duncan Frazer, gives no inadequate description of the voyage. But who will grudge to dwell for a moment upon another and a later picture ?

" They saw the Blythe and Wandsbeck floods
Rush to the sea through sounding woods ;
At Coquet Isle their beads they tell
To the good Saint who owned the cell ;
Then did the Alne attention claim,
And Warkworth, proud of Percy's name,—
And next they crossed themselves to hear
The whitening breakers sound so near,
Where, boiling through the rocks, they roar
On Dunstanborough's caverned shore.
Thy tower, proud Bamborough, marked they there,
King Ida's Castle, huge and square ;
From its tall rock look grimly down,
And o'er the swelling ocean frown !"—

It was, and yet is—a fair sight to see, in calm or storm.

Bamborough, the castled palace of British Ida, crowns the whole area of a huge, triangular, basalt rock, rising suddenly from the sea-beach, where it is flanked with natural rampires of sand, matted together with sea-rushes, to the height of a hundred and fifty feet above low-water mark. A battlemented platform springs seventy feet higher, and the huge central Keep, or Donjon, surmounts *that* by an additional seventy. The hand of Time has now dealt heavily with its magnificence, and many of the ancient fortifications are broken and defaced by the falling of the landward cliffs upon which they stood. But when the brightening eye of Constance de Mowbray looked once more upon the home of her childhood, its crowded grandeur spread over the entire brow of the rock, without one mark of feebleness or decay.

For many miles on either side of the Castle, the country slopes with a regular descent from the high inlands to the sea. The surface of this descent is exceedingly rugged in its aspect; a great stratum of whin-stone occupying the whole space, and bearing so close a resemblance to volcanic lava as to be sometimes mistaken for it. Frequently it bursts from the gentle slope, and, in a direction almost always opposite

to the sea, presents a bold, precipitous front, composed of irregular, basaltic looking columns; large fragments of which have been broken and rolled down, forming piles of ruin at their feet in every direction. As these crags are always defended by Nature, at least on one side, and are easily defensible on the others, they have, in every age, been chosen for military purposes,—by our British ancestors for a chain of hill-forts; by their Roman conquerors for a like series of *Stations*; by the Saxon kings, and Danish and Norman Earls of Northumberland for castled palaces; and, in modern days, for a succession of telegraphs. On such a crag stood the Danish ruins of Legendary Spindleston. Such form the heights of the Holy and Farn Isles. On such arise the noble ruins of Dunstanborough; and on such the kingly towers of Bamborough look far over land and sea.

It was little more than noon—the noon of a lovely day, when the voyagers landed, leaving their vessel to run to anchorage in the little roadstead of Budle. A signal had apprised the Governor what visitors were about to disembark, and, from the beach to the castle-gate, the whole distance was lined with military, their

polished armour flashing back the bright sun-rays. A deafening shout arose as the party quitted the boat; minstrels sang their lays of welcome, and, at short intervals, the trumpets rang out in shrill accompanying flourishes.

The Earl of Northumberland welcomed his Bride to Bamborough, with a stately grace, under the portal of the great main entrance. It was a gateway upon the very brink of the south-east precipice above the sea, and upon the only accessible part of the rock, defended by huge flanking towers at either side, and by a deep ditch cut through the narrow rock communicating with the mainland. From the inner Barbican there was a covered way to a second gate, and, besides these, the Keep, a vast square structure upon the highest part of the rock, had its own defences of grim walls and towers. Through them, with the homage paid to princes, De Mowbray passed with Matilda and Constance; marshalled by the Castellan himself, and attended by a whole bevy of warders, scenschals, minstrels, and other household retainers.

After the garrison had received orders to be in immediate readiness for march, and the vociferated cry, “ De Mowbray ! De Mowbray !” had evinced how joyous was their obedience, a splendid

repast was served in the banquet hall ; and the bewildered Constance saw, presiding at its almost regal board, as the Countess of her father, the very person who, only a brief month before, had spoken those strange words to her in the garden of Nunna Mynstre — “ What, if in the grim towers of Bamborough, thou hadst a sharp-tongued step-dame,” &c., &c.

She gazed with the involuntary earnestness of wonder upon the Beauty of the West Marches, thus transplanted to the no less stormy borders of the North ; and who, upon *her* part, met the unconscious scrutiny with glances of triumphant significance. The Earl, husband and father to those who might well have passed for contrasted sisters, and retaining himself so much of youthful aspect and animation, as, to a stranger, would, perhaps, have indicated only an elder brother, endeavoured to familiarize both with their position, by referring to it in a manner as nearly resembling *pleasantry* as his saturnine nature could allow.

The instant their repast was finished, De Mowbray led to the highest battlements, and shewed to the delighted Matilda that splendid prospect which the platform of the Keep presents upon every hand ; and of which every feature recalled

to Constance some joyous or tender association—

“ Ah ! happy hills ! ah, pleasing shades !
Ah, fields beloved in vain !”

To the East, glittering like burnished gold in the sunlight, and, here and there, spotted with a sail, the German Ocean expanded its billowy glory. Far north, Berwick, then in its palmy state, flourishing and fortified, showed its dim walls and smoky battlements indistinctly through the rich hazy blue of the warm atmosphere ; a golden twinkle from their spires occasionally breaking upon the eye. Nearer, upon the left, but appearing almost to melt into these, they saw the long yellow stripe, tufted with green, of the low shores of Holy Isle, swelling upwards at last to its rocky and rounded brow, crowned with a strong castle, and overshadowing the venerable monastery of St. Cuthbert—

“ A solemn, huge, and dark-red pile;
Placed on the margin of the Isle.”

The shore line opposite was gracefully broken by successive woody knolls, Old Law, Fenwick, Beal, Haggerston, and Tweedmouth. Looking only in that direction, indeed, the view almost suggested a vast inland lake.

Glancing to the right, the picture changed.

Sea and sky, with their bright azure and glittering green, were still the only back-ground; but the foot of the Holy Isle intervened upon the left, and far opposite, they saw the columned cluster of the Farns. Beyond these, island after island, crag after crag, reef after reef, succeeded, as far as the eye could penetrate; till the spray of the "Rumble-churn" at Dunstanborough, might have struck them, as it has since done a Minstrel of Romance, when

"The foam as it broke
Appeared like smoke
From a sea-volcano rising."

Due south, the delighted eye of Matilda wandered over Beadnell, Embleton, and Ratclieugh, to the faint distance beyond Dunstanborough; and then, looking wholly landward, up the rugged slope from Bamborough at her foot, over rocks and streams and moors, till the dim, doubtful peaks of Swinhoe Crag, and Coquet Isle, bounded and closed the view.

We must not now linger to accompany Constance in her wanderings over the locale of happy childhood; the towers, the ramparts, the chaperly, the little plot of garden ground; all that awoke so vividly the light-heartedness of the past, and the companionship of Raymond.

We must leave her to these, and to the welcome seclusion of her own turret; and listen, for awhile to the conversation of De Mowbray and his bride, when—alone in *their* seclusion—the Earl demanded of the Lady if she could love the halls and towers of Bamborough as well and dearly as those of Chester?

“ Better, a thousand fold!” she replied; “ so well and dearly can I love this kingly seat, that I would not lose it for every castle upon the Western Marches. No, not for Powis Land to the boot of Shropshire! Were *I* your Castellan, great Earl, I would not yield it to ten beleaguering kings with all their hosts! while there was bolt to shoot or stone to hurl.”

“ The beleaguering host of *one* King may content us,” said the Earl, “ and to *that*—God and St. Oswyn speed us!—we will *not* yield it. Nor shall it come to trial, if we have grace and fortune to meet the tyrant in open field. But, were it so, Bamborough would laugh to scorn his raging worst. Penda, the savage Mercian—he who had slain five monarchs—stormed it in vain. As vainly, usurping Eardulph, when a son of the far-famed Alfred fled hither from his grasp. The wretched Waltheof, from these walls defied Malcolm of Scotland; and when

Cospatrick had ravaged Cumberland far and near, within these walls he piled his booty, and mocked all threats of the angry Scots; King, Lords, and Churls."

"Kings may be mocked and foiled," returned the Lady, "that have the rage and fiery spleen of dragons. How lightly, then, the sceptred daws and jays, that flutter only while calm skies brighten their plumage, and the hawk sleeps or preys not!"

"Why, they are plume-plucked at the first swoop :" replied De Mowbray; "thus have been many Saxon dreamers, the royal nothings before our soaring Bastard ; kinged and un-kinged—crowned and dis-crowned—throned and cloistered, all 'twixt change and change of the moon. But they of the Norman strain are of other mould and mettle. *They* peak and pine not—neither do they dwindle. They are the eagle and vulture—things that rend and tear, and have their gory eyries built so high, that Vengeance itself flies after with weary wing, and, it may be, drops upon shattering cliffs beneath."

"What, then, is Rufus?" said Matilda.

"Such, and no less," answered her Lord ; "His blood is flame—his heart hath the raging

pulse of a thousand. All his Father from crown to toe ! He will fight for his threatened throne to its last step—load the earth with dead; and the air with cursing cries ; and have no thought that land or sea holds a grave for him ! ”

“ Well,” resumed the Countess, “ this bird of terror once stricken, and at rest—what of the King that follows—the *gentle Stephen* ? ”

She fixed her eye upon De Mowbray, while thus speaking, with a meaning look, which could not escape him.

“ Stephen,” he replied, “ is of their haughty stock; bred out of their bloody strain; and hath *that* in him which thou nor I, noble Matilda, nor one of our confederacy, need shame to bow to ; albeit, some masking, harping, wandering follies, throw stain upon it.”

“ *Blot it all o'er*, my noble Lord ;” replied Matilda, “ make drunk with folly the spirit that, when ambition calls, should set its forward step firm as a marble pillar on its base. Look to him well, great Earl—a minstrel will one day snatch at your Chancellor’s wand. Himself, for a dainty love-lay, will part his very realm with a Troubadour ; and even his Queen, the gentle Constance, may shake him to her foot, if she be angry with him in minstrel mood—O, school her

well, my Lord, to queen it wisely ; or there is one, at least, in the realm, to whom allegiance will be a jest."

" Why, lovely slanderer," said the Earl, " King Stephen hath an early traitor in thee, methinks ; but 'tis not so. Constance shall walk by thy counsel ; and *I* will look well that *his* sceptre turn not to a harp-wrest."

" Oh, princely Northumberland ! "—— exclaimed the Countess—and was then silent—but looked upon him with the meaning eyes, which told, at least, that what was *untold* sat near her heart.

" What wouldest thou, Lady ? "

" Much ; but have no voice to speak it. I would have greatness greatly borne ; and shallow, glittering, lightly-humoured things still hold their course and level. I would have nations—one, at least—king'd with the wise and strong, and not with bubbles that scarce last the blowing."

" Matilda ! "

" Oh, my Lord, my Lord ! had power and wisdom been twin-gifts to one bosom I wot of—had the spirit that braves a king been yoked with the shrewd and subtle one which makes revenge itself but a stepping-stone to all beyond

—*then had there been an Earl of Northumberland who would have shaken a Tyrant's throne to purpose!* who would have made this Castle once more a Palace—who would have left the gay and shallow, even though a Monarch's blood ran in their veins, to joust in wood and wold—tilt at the quintain—and harp and ‘*vir-i-lai*’ in hall and bower. Then—aye—*then Matilda de Aquila had seen —.*” She fixed her keen dark eye again upon him—and was again silent.

“ Seen what?” exclaimed the Earl, a little sternly, and yet impatient to hear the word spoken.

“ A King of England! to whom she could have bowed with pride and joy! whose sceptre, half iron and half gold, treason could never break. A King who would have been mighty at home and feared abroad; loved by the noble few, and dreaded by the million base. Such had *then* been, and such will Stephen of Albemarle *never be!*”

“ I understand thee, my fair councillor,” said the Earl, “ but *that* King methinks would have been *so Queened*, one empire had been too little—too narrow for their ambition—ha? Bethink thee, lovely Maud! there are who—lacking the

golden *name* of King or Queen—have yet the pomp—the pride—the state—aye, and perchance, double the *power*, of the puppets so gilded!"

"Never!" said Matilda, "*the name is power*. To *that* the many-headed thing falls down—pours out its treasures—sues to be trod upon!—O, my great lord! they that climb high mountains, e'en but for a boast, content them not but with *the top-most peak*; one little step wanting to *that*, and they have achieved nothing. Nay! I am dumb. But in my dreams—and *they* sure are no traitors—a voice will call to me, 'DE MOWBRAY SHOULD BE KING!'"

"Peace," said the Earl, "we will talk of this hereafter—it may be that ——— tush! we prate of treasures that sleep yet in mines undug."

He paced the apartment with quickened steps; and, in *him*, even *that* symptom of irritation denoted a feeling more disturbed than his wont.

"Yes—" he exclaimed at last, pausing in front of his Countess, "Thou—*thou*, Matilda! hadst been indeed a Queen for the Monarch of broad Europe! and—had the dye been so cast—which it is not and cannot be—Robert de

Mowbray had made no feeble shadow of a Monarch—no sickly, citizen thing of gold and velvet—I had been—tush! tush! we dream, we dream, we dream! Get thee to Constance, gentle Maud!"

And to Constance the *gentle* Maud went accordingly; to sound the depths and shallows of *her* ambition—if ambition she had—to learn her personal feelings towards De Albemarle, and how far, in any event, the splendid bribe of a crown would influence one so young and so unworldly.

It is needless to portray the interview, or to state the result. The transparent mind and heart of Constance could hide little from the keen deep-reading Matilda, who soon took assurance that, with a little art, the union so galling to *her* pride might yet be prevented. She even ventured, but in those tones of sarcastic ambiguity which it was her policy to play off upon all but the Earl, to applaud her step-daughter's repugnance to the marriage, and to advise, at least, steady refusal until after the approaching battle; if, indeed, sufficient interval occurred to suggest such a proposal.

That interval was *not* to occur.

Next morning a horseman rode with jaded

coursed to the barriers, and demanded, impatiently, to be led straight to the Earl.

"Good news or bad, De Lacy?" cried the latter, as his visitor advanced with the air of one whose tidings gave full exemption from ceremony.

"Passing good!" answered the Baron. "The Tyrant is marching hither with every banner of his strength, and so, too, by other and nearer paths, and with all our host, are Stephen de Albemarle and Hugh-le-Loup."

"I thank God!" exclaimed De Mowbray.—"If Stephen first make good his march, and we conjoin before the van of the foe be up—St. George! a battle may be fought and gained before to-morrow's sun-down! Good, good, De Lacy, what more? What of the siege of Durham?"

"Raised," said the Baron. "It was the vanguard of their power, under the Constable De Miles, that lay before it. Loudly were they defied from the stout walls; and loudly, as we had news by our scouts at eve, did they threaten to avenge it; hanging and thrusting forth of eyes being their gentlest words. Thereupon, well-minded to strike the first blow, we arrayed a band at night-fall—a thousand horse, and

some ten score of foot, with lance and bow; took ford at ebb of tide westward of the New Castle; and, with the first peep of dawn, rushed like a swollen river upon Milo de Miles! Down went many a hot gallant, charger and knight, old spurs and new! and, when the game was at sweetest, lo ye! a picked troop of the beleaguered garrison sallied me forth, full knightly, with brand and mace; and by St. George! for as high-stomached as the Constable is, we had given him a blank *sancus* for his morning mass, had not, of a sudden, the royal banner, broad streaming and far flashing, sent us timely note to spur steed and away! Small need, then, to bid us pack, by 'r Lady! but, meanwhile, we had reddened the grass, and emptied I know not what saddles, and laid hand, rescue or no rescue, upon some twenty knights of name; no less or worse!"

"Why, this is brave!" said De Mowbray, exultingly; "we have stricken the first blow—shed the first blood! Who led this jolly troop?"

"Stephen himself; and had well nigh stung De Miles upon his last couch, but that good help came timely."

"And comes fierce Rufus northward," said

Northumberland, "leaving two holds of strength, Tynemouth and Durham, untaken in his rear?"

"Up and away!" cried Reginald; "with every lance and banner of your power, or Rufus will himself make answer with ram and catapult upon *this* hold of strength! I promise ye we sped not back to Tynemouth to lure him thither; but, on and on, as though the word were Northward-ho! and he, deeming us, belike, but the rear of our joint power, gave chase over hill and holt, until the game was lost to the royal hunter, by special trick; for one that well knows your savage wilds, led us by hidden paths back to the good cheer of Prior Baldwin, jolly and pert as bridegrooms!"

"My soul's on fire!" exclaimed the Earl. "What, ho! within there! Torfin!—Hubert, I would say! Hast thou told all, De Lacy?"

"No," replied the Baron; "every white hath its black, and I have colder news; but they must out. Rescue (and with a heavy hand) hath been made for Alberic du Coci!"

"Ha!"

"The bird hath flown," continued Reginald. "De Tunbridge, as ye had commanded, led him before the walls of the New Castle, and threatened lustily to torture and gibbet the poor

wight, if they within surrendered not at the first flourish of trumpet. By Mary-mother I' be that blew could scarce put brass to lip ere that accursed Raymond of the Heart of Steel, with such scanty following as I take shame to tell ye of, fell like a thunder-bolt upon the summoning band, snatched the prey from their gripe, and, to the boot of that, made prisoner of De Tunbridge himself, after hurling him from the saddle with a shock like a falling tower ! So much for the gay gallant, Sir Ilbert, and for the rescue of Alberic du Coci."

De Mowbray, like the high-bred Pirate of the Cyclades, "the mildest mannered man!" quitted the chamber without a word of rage; but they that knew him might have read enough in his burning eye and compressed lips. He beckoned his guest to follow, and they passed to the battlements and court of guard.

Presently, the vast fortress resounded with the clang of steel, the heavy tread of men-at-arms, the cries of women, the neigh and stamp of coursers, and every sound of preparation for departure; the departure of all but the mere number essential to man the walls against any detachment of the Royalists; while the main body marched to the junction with De Albermarle and Hugh-le-Loup.

"I leave thee," said Earl Robert to Matilda, as the King-like warrior pressed the would-be Queen to his bosom,—“ I leave thee, lovely Maud ! but it is to return with prouder joy. Be thou my Castellan of Bamborough indeed—Victory awaits us ! As the wolf against the fold—as the falcon against the quarry, go we against the Tyrant ! Farewell, my Bride ! my loveliest ! and my bravest ! Go ! pour somewhat of thy spirit into Constance, whom I have left with the white cheek that shames a daughter of my race.”

And so they parted.

Meanwhile De Lacy had snatched a soldier's meal, and was about to hurry to the ballium, where a fresh horse awaited him, when his path was suddenly crossed by Constance, with the “white cheek,” which had so scandalized her warlike father. Earth seemed to rock beneath him ! and ocean to give up its dead ! for never had the conscience-stricken villain dared to breathe even her name within the walls of Tynemouth, and by his instant flight to Newcastle, after the rescue from Se-Blaca's caverns, and in the never-ceasing whirl of military events which followed, he was ignorant that the heroic girl still lived and suffered. Her spirit was now

fixed—invulnerable—she encountered him without a start—without a shudder—without a word or gesture. She gazed upon him with cold unchanging eye, and passed with slow unvarying step into the vaulted gloom beyond. But when her gleaming form faded in the darkness, he, who would have faced a host of foes—to whom battle and storm and wreck had been familiar things—uttered a cry of terror so loud, and rushed with such blind and headlong haste to the open air of the ballium, to see human faces and hear human voices, that if, indeed, there is power given to the spirits of evil to keep surveillance over their slaves on earth, the triumph of *one* fiend, at least, was anticipated that hour, and infernal laughter might have been heard as De Lacy fled from the chambers of Bamborough!—

“ ‘Tis conscience that makes cowards of us all!”

CHAPTER XIII.

" Out, alas ! what a grief is this !
 That princes' subjects cannot be true !
 But still the devil hath some of his,
 Will play their parts whatsoever ensue !
 Forgetting what a grievous thing
 'Tis to offend the anointed king.
 Alas, for woe !
 Why should it be so ?
 This makes a sorrowful heigh-ho !"
The King of Scots and Andrew Browne.

We agree with the poet of the Orlando—

" Come raccende il gusto il mutare esca
 Così mi par che la mia I storia quanto,
 Or quâ, or là più variata sia
 Meno a chi l'udira nojoso sia."

And, therefore, while the Northern levies of the insurgents file out in long array from the towers of Ida, banner after banner, pennon after pennon, to join their Southern allies ; and while Matilda, lance in hand, like the presiding Genius of chivalry, waves adieu from the battlements,

we will outstrip them “upon imagined wing,” and, for a little interval, go back to the few preceding days—to the banks of Tyne, and to Raymond Cœur d’Acier.

With respect to the gallant Squire, however, our purpose may, perhaps, be answered by setting before the reader a certain Cavalier in complete armour of trellised mail, of that blue tinge which is given by fire to steel, and whom, therefore, as is known to all readers of romance, we have a privilege to call, for distinction’s sake, “*the Blue Knight.*”

This personage, whom we shall merely describe as being of the precise height, bulk, strength, activity, and so on, of Raymond, and as constantly wearing either a close pyramidal helmet, or the hauberk hood, drawn over the head and neck, was an object of mysterious interest to the whole royal camp. Immediately after the successful storming of the New Castle, as related by De Lacy, he had appeared before the King upon his march, thrown himself at the royal foot, with the keys of the recovered fortress, and presenting them as an earnest of his future loyalty; prayed to be admitted in any honourable capacity to serve against the rebels. Birth, rank, name, fortunes, all were a shut book. He de-

clined to answer one question respecting them, or, rather, made it his earnest entreaty that the Monarch would not so interrogate him until he had done further and more important services in the busy scenes about to follow. Rufus, highly chivalrous, however despotic, and delighted with the youth's first achievement, willingly allowed of the incognito, and swore by St. Luke's face, that if the Springald were not yet "Right Worshipful" (as the gilded spurs did not appear), it was high time he should be so. Striking his kneeling suitor, therefore, with his sword, he bade him arise with the designation, *pro tempore*, of "*The Knight of the Stormed Castle.*"

The new chevalier seemed determined to brighten his new spurs, for, returning with fiery speed to prepare the royal entry into Newcastle, he was in time to make the equally daring and successful sally which the Baron of Newark has also described, and, by which, not only were the rebels discomfited with greatly inferior forces, but Du Coci was snatched from a dangerous captivity, and Sir Ilbert de Tunbridge made captive himself. The exploit set the stamp of the King's favour indelibly upon his unknown champion; although, for some reason, we must observe, the captor concealed the name of his prisoner from the royal ear.

Battle is generally a mid-way point between revel and funeral ; at least it has generally been so with the chivalry of this island, from the field of Hastings to that of Waterloo.

There was a banquet in the great hall of the fortress, so often mentioned in these pages, the now Old Castle, which originally gave name to New-castle, and was built by the King's brother, Robert of the Short-hose, to keep in awe both the intractable Northumbrians, and their savage enemies the Scotch. No doubt it was worth all the trouble of building, and taking and re-taking. The keep was a *Gundolf* nearly ninety feet high; the walls were fourteen feet in thickness; the outworks corresponded; and the whole stood high upon the river bank, so as to command not only the town but a considerable reach of the stream, and the only bridge across it for some distance.

In the hall, now, alas ! a common kitchen, although decorated with some mixed fragments of arms and armour, all of a much later date than our tale, King William Rufus feasted his loyal Barons and Knights upon the eve of battle, and played the royal host with all the careless jollity and humour proper to "Li Reis Roa," (as the old minstrel, Wace, calls him,) when amongst the favoured of his lieges in convivial

moments. Around sat the stately Barons of England; the noble and gallant ancestors (with all their faults) of the most noble and gallant nobility (with all their faults) in the world.

There were the Percies and the Bigods, and the Grantmishils; the Mortimers and the Staffords; the Clares, the Beauchamps—the Montgomerys—the Warennes—the De Veres—and a long list of names mighty for good and evil in English annals.

There, too, quaffing, perhaps, from the same goblet, and carousing with one heart, sat the “*forbears*” of future aspirants to Scottish royalty; the Baliols and the Bruces,* both gifted by the Conqueror with estates in Mother England. There, in all the distinction of conquest and mystery of concealment, sate the Blue Knight of the Stormed Castle; and, near him, attended in especial by our worthy friend Nicholas, appeared Sir Alberie du Coci, Castellan, at length, in good earnest, of those coveted towers. And there, strange to say, and, indeed, to the surprise (perhaps disgust) of many, sat the venerable Jodesac *cum Barba*

* The lovely estate of Castle Eden, half-way betwixt Wear and Tees, was given by the Conqueror to an ancestor of King Robert Bruce.

looking exceedingly like some white-bearded prophet of the primal day, feasting with the armed captains of hundreds and captains of thousands of the rejoicing host to which he had prefigured victory. Nor after such mention, must we irreverently forget the presence of the Bishops of Rochester and of Lincoln, besides some ecclesiastics of lower grade ; Priors looking for fat abbacies, and Abbots longing for translation.

Last, but far from least, and neither Earl, Baron, Knight, Squire, Jew, nor (as yet) Bishop, but as bold, as turbulent, as blythe-some, as rapacious, and as stately as the whale, there sat the great Justiciary Flambard, who, upon a special mission, (the mortgage of Guienne and Poictou for money to equip their Duke for the Crusades), had hurried down to the Royal camp, and sate now within whispering distance of the King's ear. Council was thus economically mixed up with *revel*, and the Monarch and his favourite might confer at pleasure, without "displacing the general mirth."

"Now, tell me," said Milo de Miles, apart to the Marshal, "what smooth conceit in yonder paper doth the King love so well that his lungs are tickled thus to crowing?"

"Some biting jest of the good Ranulph's ;" answered Montgomery. "Some fresh device, I warrant, for the emptying of other men's purses. By our Lady ! no man's pottage is safe from *their* spoon ; Knight or wight—Earl or churl."

The random shaft hit the bull's eye. Rufus, never so gay as upon the eve of battle, especially if *money-raising* furnished matter of conversation, laughed and chuckled over a scroll given him by Flambard, who merely curled his thin lip with the sardonic smile which was his utmost visible indulgence of mirth. The scroll was headed "Fines and Oblatos," and the King read from it, with great gusto, the following, and other minutes of like decency :—

"*Imprimis.*—Twenty marks from Richard the son of Gilbert, for the King's help, that he may recover his debt from the Jews.

"*Item.*—Five marks, and twenty lampreys, and two hundred hens ; from the wife of Hugh de Neville, that she may visit her husband in prison for one day and one night.

"*Item.*—Twenty marks and twenty shads, from Peter de Peraris, for leave to salt fishes as Peter Chevron used to do.

"*Item.*—Two Norway hawks and a hundred

shillings from Ralph de Mitford, that the King will protect him in the matter of Roger Bertram's mother.

“ *Item.*—A hundred marks and two palfreys with housings, from Hugh, Archdeacon of Wells, that his concubine and his children may be let out upon bail.

“ *Item.*—A hundred lampreys, and ten peacocks, and one tun of good wine from the Bishop of Winchester, for his not putting the King in mind to give garters and a girdle to the Countess of Gloucester.

“ *Item.*—Ten marks, and five palfreys, with housings, and a cast of hawks with bells and bewits thereunto, from Robert de Burton, that the King will hold his tongue about Henry Pinel’s wife.”

Such were the substantial jests which amused King William; and such the modest registration of Exchequer Barons, in those golden days of equitable government.

Du Coçi now told the strange tale of his adventure in Se-Blaca’s caverns, and for his pains excited much more merriment than sympathy.

“ By St. Luke’s face!” cried Rufus, with one of his tremendous laughs, “ much fear was there

and little peril ! the saw is old, Sir Alberic, and well approved, they *drown* not that have other weird fore-doomed."

" I thank heaven for my company then !" answered the Knight ; " but I can tell ye, my Liege, it was well nigh choking time with the strongest of us ; for as gamesome as the matter seems in this presence."

" And how looked our gracious Cousin King Stephen ?" asked the Monarch.

" As like a true Prince," replied Du Coci honestly, " as a false one might.—Looking upon the billows that came on like lions, as though they would go back as such at his royal glance. Little cared the roarers for *that*, and *would have done*, had a *true* Prince been there ; even he* who once asked, ' Didst thou ever hear of a King that was drowned ? ' "

" And how bore him the lost varlet Raymond, De Mowbray's fiery gallant ? ha ? he of the Heart of Steel ?"

" Why, with stout heart, as the Heart of Steel should," answered the Knight. " I say it not in courtesy, but even your Grace's new Gallant yonder, the Knight of the Stormed Castle, had borne him no better."

* Rufus himself, at Dartmouth.

"And the remaining twain?" said Rufus,
"what of them?"

"One," replied the Castellan, "whom *I* will answer for, wished himself in Abraham's bosom, if better might not be; and t'other cursed as horribly as though he had been already in Hell, and knew that worse could not be."

"Rebellious dog!" cried the King. "Ocean hath cast him back to earth that fire and steel may work upon him! and we will have his lands and moveables—manors and castles! his, and our loyal kinsman's, Lopus, and the great Devil, De Mowbray's, and those of all their faction! Marry, my loving lieges, 'tis but in good time! for our Welsh wars, and these home bickerings, and building castles, and (in our love to mother church!) abbeys and priories, have shorn our treasury of its last golden fleece."

"Chiefly," said Flambard, "and I speak it with solemn reverence, your Grace's singular love of holy church! building, as ye have said, huge monasteries (as, for example, of Carlisle,) and priories (as of Armethwaite,) and hospitals, (as of St. Leonard's, in York.) The Lord be bountiful unto you and us! and make us thankful for your heavenly-mindedness! in especial,

the servants of mother church, our bishops, abbots, and priors, who, if grace be given them, will, of a surety, come forward with heaped coffers in this time of pinching need!—I crave your Grace's leave to fill this goblet to all and sundry such holy prelates, wishing them the healthful spirit to give largely out of their boundless abundance!"—

The toast went round with solemn mockery.

"I thank the great Justiciary," said a spirited Ecclesiastic present, "for my own poor part herein; and pray well that he remember him what goodly pickings and gleanings fell of late from the Abbey of Waltham to the Royal Exchequer."

"Good, pious souls!" exclaimed the Favourite, with the same sneering gravity.—"Over bountiful were they at our request!—but, as ensample to others, I will publish it aloud in Gath and Askalon, and all the cities of the Philistines. Six thousand six hundred and sixty-six pounds,* current money of his Grace's realm, did they impart unto us *as a benevolence*, by melting of chalices, and pixies, of tabernacles,

* A modest *fact*. Very correctly stated by the Minister, such being the sum to a nicety. "*Forsooth, a great arithmetician!*"

and ampuls ; and candlesticks and phialitories, and basins and chrysmatories ; and by a modest yielding up of copes and crosses, and albs, and stoles, and chasubles, and morses. Nevertheless," continued the facetious Procurator, " there are, even amongst the ungodly, those who cast in their mite with a willing heart ; as, for example, my Liege and Lords, *this* pitiable poor and perishing man, Jodesac of Winchester, who, in his unworldliness, scarce knowing a shekel from a bezant, hath yet journied hither for very love and loyalty, to make tender to his Grace of some poor sixty merks !"

" And we will deal with him after his desert," said the King. " Let him advance, and make deposit before all this presence ; that he may be as a burning light to the Synagogue, and put to shame the Gentiles of niggard hand ! Hast thou those shekels of gold and shekels of silver under thy gaberdine, good Israelite ? "

" Thou art gamesome, O King !" said the child of the Promise. " But remember, I pray thee, that the sixty merks were as a price and a sum for the power of thy royal breath. Hast thou, indeed, turned back the youth to the paths of the steps of his fathers ? and made him to renounce alike the fierce and superstitious doings of thy people ? "

“ Infidel dog !” exclaimed the Bishop of Rochester, in high wrath at this exordium.

“ Stiff-necked abomination !” cried his brother of Lincoln.

“ Get thee behind us, Satan !” shouted a third Dignitary.

While a fourth crossed himself and repeated the adjuring formula :

“ Per hoc signum sancti crucis,
Libera me de malignis,” &c. &c.

“ Peace, men of zeal !” cried the Monarch ; “ and do thou, Jodesac, deposit thy small nothing of a gift. The shekels, I say, Jew ! the shekels !”

Jodesac looked about him, as if to gather from surrounding faces what course were best, and then, suddenly, as if distrusting his own resolution, laid a small bag at the King’s foot, which the nimble fingers of the Justiciary closed upon like harpy talons.

“ Stand forth,” said the Monarch, “ our Castellan, Alberic du Coci. Hast thou a squire hight ‘ Nicholas with the Sword ? ”

“ I have, my Liege,” answered the Knight ; “ and the sweet youth is here”—beckoning forward the modest Nicholas.

“ Who made thee a lover of pork ? ” said the King, “ with that beaked visage of thine ? Back

to thy trough and wallow ! go ; kiss the beard of thy father, and repent thee into thy birth-right. If not, by St. Luke's face, I will put long divorce 'twixt thee and swine's flesh ! I will have thee shaven a monk upon yonder grim islands of Farn, and scourged from *matins* to *compline* with knotted thongs !”

“ I swear to thee, great King ! ” answered Nicholas, “ that I am under a vow to St. Abraham, St. Isaac, and St. Jacob, to do my devoir in the coming battle ! and that I will be shaven from crown to toe, and scourged from Pentecost to mid-winter ere I become forsworn ! I call these holy Bishops to witness, that I am a Christian sinner and no Jew ! ”

“ Thou hearest, Jodesac,” resumed the King. “ Thou hearest ! the knave is a stiff-necked knave ! he must needs keep his vow ; I grieve to say it ; and doubly, yea, trebly do I grieve to give thee back the shekels. But we are just, even as thou art generous ; and, seeing that we have not wrought out fully the matter in hand, will return thee the price appointed, saving only that poor moiety which is righteously due to us for having laboured in thy cause ; to wit, thirty marks ! Divide the spoil, good Ranulph, and let the son of Jacob depart in peace.”

Jodesac shrugged his venerable shoulders; and then, without speaking, shook his thin fingers in the face of Nicholas; while the Minister, with a gravity which convulsed the board, told out thirty pieces of money, and then gave back the reduced purse to the Jew.

"And canst thou," said the latter, undismayed by the mighty presence in which he stood; "Canst thou do this thing, and rend from me that which is mine, even whilst the feast brings merriment to thee, and wine maketh thine heart glad?"

"I can," returned the ready-witted and brazen-fronted Flambard; "for thou, Jodesac, knowest that 'a feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry,' but '*money answereth for all things!*' Go—make thy face shine; let not thine heart be at thy left side! Go!"

"I go," answered the stately Jew, "with a sick heart, for I have conceived chaff and brought forth stubble. I depart from amongst ye, seeing that it is ever as the Wisdom of old spake—'Behold! the Prince requireth, and the Judge asketh for a reward. They do evil with both hands earnestly—the best of them is as a brier—the most upright is sharper than a thorn-hedge!'"

"Fill full, my lieges," said Rufus, after the

jest of the thirty merks was over, and the Jew had departed, “ and drink we to the speedy division into baronies of those vast earldoms, Northumberland and Chester. By St. Luke’s face ! we will find finger-room in the pasty for laics and clerics both ! Who here of mother church would be an Abbot, when we have hanged up yon burly Baldwin of Tynemouth ?”

“ I, good my liege !” cried a portly Prior, “ and will consider your Grace’s need in these pinching days !”

“ And I, great King !” shouted another “ round, fat, oily man of cloisters ; ” “ I would full fain be the shepherd of that flock, and I will consider thine exchequer well ! I will lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance !”

“ And what wilt *thou* do ?” said Rufus to a pale, grave monk, whose eye had turned from one of these Simoniacial traffickers to the other, with genuine glances of scorn and detestation ; “ what wilt *thou* give, ha ?”

“ Nothing,” replied the Monk, with quiet firmness.

“ Nothing !” repeated the King.

“ Nothing !” echoed Flambard, in mock astonishment—“ Nothing ? Bethink thee, good book-a-bosom ! bethink thee ! Nothing ! Knowest

thou the *riches* of yonder monastery? its lands? its tithes? its villas? its mills? advowsons? fisheries? and rents? its fairs? its rights of *sac* and *socne*? *infangeon theof*? tol and team? its privilege of courts and wreck of the sea? ha? Knowest thou all this, and sayst thou will give *nothing*?"

"I hear it," said the Priest, "and will give **NOTHING**. It were a deadly sin."

"Then, by St. Luke's face! thou art the honestest fellow of the three," exclaimed Rufus, "and shalt be Abbot of Tynemouth, without payment of one sinful penny! Fill me a goblet there! fill all, and drink we to the Abbot elect; he hath saved me, perchance, from seeing the devil caper upon money-bags, as Saxon Edward, the crowned Confessor, saw him upon those filled with the Danegelt Tax."

"Aye," said the Bishop of Rochester (an old thorn in the King's side) "that tax, great Sovereign, for the levying of which Archbishop Aldred cursed thy father with his dying breath!"

"Why," answered Rufus, "ye be good cursers, ye priests—curses are as meat and drink to ye—nay, ye boast of being clothed with them as with a garment; or of clothing others, I know not well which. But, to-morrow, he that fights not shall

pray ; and, he that prays not for us, I will clothe him in a doublet of stone, with hose of iron. Sir Knight of the Stormed Castle ! thou that hast stricken the first blow ! taken the first stronghold ! made the first knightly prisoner ! what sayest thou ? Shall we have splintering of lances, and cleaving of helms and shields to thy heart's content ? ”

“ Let me not answer as a boaster, great King ! ” replied the Blue Knight ; “ I have done no more than the least here would have done, with the like bitter prompting. For this fortress, I took it with borrowed power—the power of Sir Alberic du Coci—and upon him (who would have wrought as fairly had he been free) be all the honour and fair fame. I crave but to dispose of one prisoner until the battle be over, and then that, if my prayer be still for mercy upon his head, that prayer may be heard.”

“ Tush ! ” said Rufus, little accustomed to requests so modest, “ be near me when the battle joins.” And then, turning to Montgomery, De Miles, and others of his more mature chivalry, the shrewd son of the Conqueror spoke of past victories, jested upon past follies, and said a thousand things which, in the poetical language of Scripture, were as “ dew upon the grass ” to the spirits of all around.

So passed the evening with the “court and camp” of William Rufus; but an early hour finished the revel, and the first beams of the morning sun showed

“Battle’s magnificently-stern array!”

The live-long night the clink of armourers’ hammers had been heard every where within the double walls of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and, very soon after day-break, the whole Host, five-and-twenty thousand strong, was equipped for march and battle. These were fighting-men, exclusive of the usual hangers-on of an army, sutlers, women, and “camp-followers,” in general.

The greater part heard mass, and made confession; and the Bishops of Rochester and Lincoln officiated before the King and some of the chief nobles, in the little chapel, whose beautiful ruins are still the pride of the towers of “Courthoese.”

The Pursuivants-at-arms of the Lord High Marshal then rode along the crowded ranks, and, at every banner-stand, proclaimed the statute of the King for military observance, as follows:—

THE STATUTE.

I. *For Obeysance.*—That no man be so hardy to raise banner or pennon of St. George, to draw together, or withdraw men from the host; nor

to cry “havoc!” for token of pillage ; nor to take prisoner a child under fourteen, unless he be a lord, a knight, or a worshipful man’s son ; nor to disarray him in the battle for any tidings that come into the host.

II. *For Holy Church*.—That no man be so hardy, unless he be a priest, to touch the Sacrament of God’s body, nor the vessel which it is in ; nor to slay any man of holy church, unless he be armed ; nor to make prisoner any such holy man. Upon pain to be drawn and hanged, or, at the best, to be imprisoned, and his goods forfeit, and his body at the King’s will.

III. *For Watch and Ward*.—Every man to keep watch and ward duly and truly, night and day in his herbergage* ; to waste no victuals ; and to look well that his men-at-arms and archers make no raids†, without license of the Constable or Marshal.

IV. *For Prisoners*.—He that first bears a man to the earth and taketh his “fey,”‡ to him he shall belong ; but, if he leave him, and another come after that, and take his “fey,” then shall he be prisoner to them both ; but in the ward

* Lodging.

† Pillaging excursions.

‡ Faith. Pledge of yielding and submission.

of the first; and, in respect that the enemy be all rebels and traitors, no man to put a prisoner to ransom, but to bring him, when the battle is stricken and done, to the ward of the Constable or Marshal.

V. *For Provision against time of Siege and Leaguer.*—Every man to have, or to make him a fair and goodly faggot* of thirteen feet in length, the same to be without leaves. Every Captain and Constable to have, or to make him a goodly fair stake of eleven feet in length, the same to be without knot-gaule or freat†. Every seven men-at-arms to have or to make them a goodly fair ladder, strong and sufficient, and of fifteen rounds; and every two yeomen to have or to make them a goodly fair pavesse‡ of boards, that the one may hold while the other shooteth.

VI. *For 'Haviour and Bearing.*—That no man be so hardy to quarter him in any other wise than by assignment of herbergage from the Marshal or Constable, upon pain of losing his best horse; or, if an archer or a foot-boy, to have his ears cut off. Nor any man to go into any herbergage where any woman lyeth *in gesem*§, to rob or pill of any good which longeth to her

* *Faggot.* For the filling up of castle ditches.

† Imperfection or canker.

‡ Large shield. § *In gesem.* Child-bed.

refreshing. Nor any to give reproaches to any because of the country, or kind, or strain he is of; nor to say any villany thereunto—through the which villany-saying there may fall out sudden manslaughter, to the shame of the camp, and the scandal thereof, and the great scathe of the cause of his royal grace the King;—on pain of hanging and drawing, or, at the best, to be imprisoned, and his goods forfeit, and his body at the King's disposal.

These ordinances proclaimed, the Royal army marched through the north gate of the “New Castle,” in well-ordered battalia; banners waving, and pennons fluttering; armour flashing, and music thrilling. It consisted of about three thousand* well equipped men-at-arms; Earls, Barons, Knights, Esquires, and their substitutes; four thousand archers, and twelve thousand infantry, including scouts, and perhaps two thousand of what were denominated “naked foot,” as of inferior arms and equipments; wearing only a defence of courbilly, or jacked leather,

* In computing the numbers of an army, every man-at-arms should be counted as *three*; each having two squires, one to bear his lance, &c., the other as “body squire.”—See *Froissart*. This brings the heavy cavalry of the Royalists in the text to nine thousand.

instead of the jazerant or mailed frock of their fellows; and carrying only a pike or mallet, whilst the better furnished bore lances, swords, battle-axes, and brown-bills.

The whole body of infantry was divided into thousands, hundreds and twenties; corresponding in some degree with our modern regiments, companies and squads. The cavalry, into *constabularies*, or small bodies of twenty-five or thirty men, and so named from the *constables* or petty officers who commanded them. Two of these might be under the pennon of a knight, and at least four were requisite for the dignity of a banneret; that is to say, thirty-five men-at-arms, each attended by two of inferior rank. These were the redoubtable Norman chivalry, whose fame rang through the world, harnessed from crown to toe in mail of proof; mounted upon heavy chargers, and armed with lance, sword, battle-axe, mallet of arms and dagger of mercy; the broad *heater* shield hanging from the neck, and a massy helmet protecting the head.

The *hobilers*, or light-armed prickers, for reconnoitring, bringing intelligence, intercepting, harassing, and pursuing, formed another distinct body. They rode small active horses, wore brigantines and bacinets, and were armed

with sword, spear, knife, and some with long-bow.

Lastly, the archers, of whom many were English, and deadly shooters of the “cloth-yard shaft,” marched in coats of mail and skull-caps; with bow, target and sword; the quiver, containing twenty-four arrows, hung at their back upon the right side, balanced upon the other by a huge heavy *maul*, for the purpose of dispatching the wounded. Each Bowman also carried with him two or three sharp stakes (like the classical *valla*) to be fixed in the ground, as a sort of chevaux-de-frize against cavalry.

Amongst the “naked foot” were three or four hundred Welsh, wild and desperate looking savages, totally without defensive armour, almost without clothing, and carrying only a *glaive*, or a long knife, which they used with fearful dexterity.

Such was the host of Rufus, as it marched out of Newcastle. The scouts first, well mounted, and followed by a sufficient number of hobilers and archers for their protection. The masters of offices, provosts, and other camp functionaries were next in advance. Then the main vanguard, both foot and horse; men-at-arms, archers and hobilers; headed by the Constable

De Miles. The Royal Standard followed, borne by the first esquire of the esquerry, and attended by chosen knights, heralds, pursuivants, and pages upon trapped war-horses, leading others for the King's use, loaded with his helmets and lances. Next, a band of trumpeters preceded the banner of the Monarch, borne by Fitz-Hammon, the first chamberlain of his household, and in like manner attended by knights, pages, and heraldic officers. Rufus, himself, rode after these upon a white hackney, amidst a glittering concourse of the pride of Anglo-Norman nobility. The rear-guard, a thousand men-at-arms, and nearly twice as many of other denominations, was brought up by Hugo de Montgomery, the Lord High Marshal.

They slept that night at Morpeth, the castle of which continued to be stoutly defended by Roger de Merley; and there the surprise of the monarch was excited by the non-appearance of the "Knight of the Stormed Castle." No one could make any report of him after the banquet, either upon quitting Newcastle, or during the subsequent march; and the shadow of a moment's misgiving crossed the King's brow when it was said, that one had seen from his "herbergage" the Knight who was captured by

the Blue Cavalier, when Du Coci was rescued, ride out of the main north sally-port of the town, at a late hour of the preceding night, attended by his squire.

At a late hour, however, of *that* night, in Morpeth, letters were conveyed by unknown hands to the royal lodging, and to that of Sir Alberic du Coci.

To Sir Alberic, the writer says,—

“ If we meet not again, in respect that a fierce battle must soon be stricken, have kind and dear remembrance of one who loved well the Knight of the Broken Lance. And let not calumny breathe upon my name for this departure and absence, which are well-purposed, answer they never so ill. I am not, indeed, so sad of cheer but that a hope keeps well with me to greet thee once more, and to reveal much that I have yet hidden: yet, should that hope prove false, I will but desire of the good Sir Alberic to find time and place for so much whispered breath in the ear of Constance de Mowbray as may tell her that *he* (alas! she will guess *whom*) was true to Honour and to HER. Be that the sole epitaph of one she *might* have loved.

" As I journied, last night, to whence this is written, a little watch-fire, gleaming in a wood, drew me to play the listener. Thou wilt clutch at thy dagger-hilt to learn that they within were the accursed Saxon Wolfsic and the fierce crone his sister ! *My* fingers tingled to grasp, at once, *his* throat and the steel that should pierce it through ! But their words charmed me to be still and listen, and I held back the hand of vengeance as he that holds a bloodhound, when the cry is loud and the scent is strong. But, O the listened words ! O the dark tale they tell ! If the fiend Reginald de Lacy escape *my* hand, upon *thy* soul, brave Knight, be the quest bound to hunt him to Destruction ! But I yet trust that God drew him but from the fierce ocean to give him, in due time, to my fiercer revenge ! This *Wolfsic* too, a haunting devil to me long, I learned—but it is not for scribe-work to tell thee—meanwhile, the fiend he serves hath again saved him. When this is in *thy* hand, the King too will have a scroll from him who bids thee, again and again, forget not

" The Knight of the Stormed Castle."

The epistle to the Monarch was as follows :—

" My Liege will know, ere the Host be long risen, that *my* pennon is not under his royal banner. If this be not redeemed a hundred fold when the battle joins, I will take heed that life hath no longer date than honour; meanwhile, I conjure your royal grace, by our Lady, and by St. George, and by every saint in Heaven, *beware of an ambuscade upon to-morrow's march!* Pass not forest or crag without quick espial of scouts, and, above all, if a lance be lifted with *two* streamers at its head, halt banner there and then! and let a picked squadron sweep round and charge in flank. My soul upon the issue!"

" And *mine*," exclaimed the King, " upon *thy* faith!"

And then, summoning the Constable and Marshal, he gave order for *their* observance of the warning thus conveyed.

At sunrise they pursued their march in the direction of Alnwick, which was one of the strongholds of the rebels, secured for them by Ivo de Vesco; but as certain information had now reached the King, that De Albemarle and De Mowbray were advancing to meet him in open field, no time was lost in attempting to invest it.

Glancing to the right from the scene of De

Mowbray's triumph over the Scottish King, they crossed the Ane at Hawkshill, and pursued the coast road by Long Houghton, Sterwick, and Standford.

And here it is that our Geography first fails us. By some defacing stains, and other injuries, the very valuable and curious MS.* which we have hitherto followed, as to main facts and military movements in this history, becomes suddenly and provokingly illegible. No research in other quarters has yet enabled us to supply the hiatus. We are, indeed, inclined to suspect

* It is well known that in historical productions of this kind every deviation from ordinary history, that is to say, from the works of Messrs. Henry, Hallam, Hume, Lingard, &c. is attributable to certain valuable MSS., possessed exclusively by the author or editor, and uncontestedly more valid and copious than the mere monkish chronicles which the above gentlemen have so implicitly followed. Such were the literary treasures of those great and fortunate men, Sir Arthur Wardour, Dr. Dryasdust and Captain Clutterbuck; and the author of RUFUS has to boast his own felicity in possessing the sole copy of an invaluable MS. (a history of the Red King) accredited beyond a shadow of suspicion, and which he now makes known to the world by the title of *The Boke of Bebbanburg*; i.e. the Book of Bamborough. Whenever, therefore, in his present pages, there appears a variation of statement from common history, the reader may be assured that it is upon the sole but indubitable authority of the said MS., as we shall not fail to apprise him by appending, marginally, the words "*Boke of Bebbanburg.*"

that, from false rumours and other causes, some confused movements and counter-marches had taken place on both sides, for it is plain, at last, that *an ambush* was laid for the Royal Host at the foot of one of those singular ranges of Basalt which we have already described as occurring continually in that district, but the precise situation of which we certainly cannot “lay down” with accuracy. The writer, however, (of the MS. we mean) has given us the scene, in his quaint way, with so many identifying touches, that to those who are familiar with “bleak Northumbria,” the *locale* may, perhaps, be sufficiently clear.

It was near the close of evening when a cry of “Halt, banner!” ran along the vanguard of the Royal Host, and they who rode forward to meet the scouts hurrying back to the main body, saw before them a range of basalt crag, with a wood of thick dark foliage at its foot, a chain of little hills upon the one side, and a brook of rapid water, whose banks were also wooded to some distance, upon the other.

There was no sign of life, except a few ravens hovering far above; but the practised eye of Milo de Miles saw the likelihood of the spot for “miching mallico” as Hamlet calls it.

"Ride out, Sir Alberic," he cried to Du Coci, "and bring sure word what manner of road is yonder."

The Knight put spurs to his hackney, and was soon within arrow flight of the pass, for so the road might be called as it wound between the forest and the crag foot.

There was no sound to break the twilight stillness, except the light breeze that waved only the lightest branches—the distant rush of the brook—and an occasional neigh from the steeds of the men-at-arms.

Had the good Sir Alberic been only upon "errant quest," like the wandering knights who sought adventures "by wood and wold," and lingered at pleasure upon every spot that charmed them, he might well have doffed his casque and shield, after their romantic wont, and reclined him to meditate upon his "ladye-love."

The broken fragments of rock rolled down from the columned front of the great mass, lay in every variety of grotesque form and fantastic grouping. Nor was the picturesque wildness of the scene that of sterility and gloom. The soil, in sheltered crevices of the crags, was rich with decay of moss and leaves, and with earths washed down by the rains from above; and there the

purple-bellied rod of the fox-glove nodded over its broad grey leaves ; and thyme and heather, and wild sage and horehound, the blue hare-bell and the honey-suckle, quaffed the dews of heaven as gratefully, and seemed as lavish of their unregarded sweets, as though they flourished under the culture of some gentle hermit-lady, "herself a fairer flower." Luxuriant lichens, too, everywhere clothed the sides of the columns, their grey tints harmonizing well with the leaves of the mountain ash, and the silvery coat of the birch ; and contrasting as finely with the deep green of the whin, the furze, and the wild dog-rose.

It was, we repeat, a fair scene, but the Knight had far other study in hand than botany or the picturesque. He looked only for the gleam of steel ; he listened only for some sound of a hidden foe.

All, however, was dim, lifeless, and silent.

Quitting the saddle, and climbing a severed rock, he loosened one of its fragments, and, with his full strength, threw it amongst the shattered *debris* beyond. Its fall surprised and startled him, the sound having a metallic and ringing jar, so loud and sharp, that it seemed as if his missile had been hurled upon the corslet

of a giant ! Ignorant of the property of these crags to produce such sounds, Du Coci strained his eye in every direction, and almost instantly saw, above one of the highest points of the rock, a lifted pennon with two streamers fluttering from its head—the very signal of admonition fixed by the Blue Knight. It waved for some time in clear relief against the sky—disappeared—rose again above another point—again sank, and again rose above another of the columned peaks, and so on, until lost behind intervening trees.

Hastily mounting, Sir Alberic rode back to the Host : eager and joyous to communicate tidings which were as eagerly and joyously received.

The rear had, by this, began to crowd upon the centre, and that again upon the van, in spite of the repeated cries of “ Halt, Banner ! ” these being disregarded in the general impatience to advance. But now, Esquires and Hobilers were dispatched along every line to give note of the discovered ambush ; and the King, the Marshal, and Constable took council for immediately dislodging the enemy.

It was determined that Gifford, Earl of Buckingham, and Sir Alberic du Coci, with a strong

detachment of men-at-arms and archers, should try the pass of the nearest fork of the hills upon the right ; and, by an attack in flank, either shut them between two fires, or drive them to open battle upon the plain. They formed accordingly, rode slowly, and in silence, through the hilly pass, and came suddenly upon “ a plump of spears,” the advanced guard of the enemy, whose main body and rear, a dense mass bristling with spears and bills, appeared stretching far north and west ; while the hidden van occupied the defile between the forest and the cliffs.

There was a loud, shrill cry, and then the shock of meeting coursers, of shivered lances and falling riders. Neither party, however, had definite advantage, and they merely fell back upon their respective Hosts ; the Royalists to increase their numbers at least before another attack in flank, and the Insurgents to report the discovery of their ambuscade ; advanced parties upon either side remaining almost within bow-shot.

Night, however, now drew on ; and it seemed agreed by both Powers to hold their several positions until morning, when the fortune of the day might be tried, either in pitched battle, if De Albemarle cared to leave his entrenchments,

or by a struggle in the defile, if he determined rather upon the defensive.

The rich twilight died away. There was no moon till a late hour, and only a faint starlight glimmered down upon the opposed Hosts. Both, therefore, prepared for battle at peep of dawn. Watch-fires were lit—and horses and men refreshed—and then all lay upon the cold ground in their armour; many chargers secured only by their reins bound to *misericordes* thrust into the sod, and the riders pillow'd upon their shields, with arms laid ready to be snatched up at the first peal of the trumpet.

CHAPTER XIV.

" Now the storm begins to lour,
(Haste, the loom of hell prepare,) Iron sleet of arrowy shower
Hurtles in the darkened air.

Ere the ruddy sun be set,
Pikes must shiver, javelins sing,
Blade with clattering buckler meet,
Hauberk crash and helmet ring !

Horror covers all the heath,
Clouds of carnage blot the sun,
Sisters, weave the web of death !
Sisters, cease, the work is done."

Gray.—" *The Fatal Sisters.*"

BEFORE sunrise, all doubt as to the intentions of De Mowbray and De Albemarle was at an end. The vanguard and a considerable portion of their main body had defiled while it was yet dark from the wood ; and in a short time their whole host, about twenty-three thousand fighting men of all classes, appeared drawn out in form of battle.

This power was divided into three masses, or, as the phrase went, battles, each containing an almost equal number of men-at-arms, archers,

and infantry ; the heavy-armed of the latter forming the centre ranks ; the light-armed and the archery the front ; and the cavalry, or men-at-arms, stationed behind both. The central division, however, was strengthened by a reserved corps of a thousand horse in its rear. It occupied also a rising ground secured from attack behind by trenches ; while the right wing was flanked by the crags and brook ; and the left by the hills and some hastily constructed ramparts of stakes and ozier-hurdles.

The sun shone magnificently upon this triple host, which, from the perfect state of its equipment, made a very gallant and formidable show.

The Royal Army, a little superior in numbers, was also divided into three lines, but without intervals between them ; the first, consisting, as did the enemy's, of archers and light-armed infantry, was under the leading of the Constable De Miles. The second, commanded by the redoubted giant, Montgomery, comprised the strongest and most heavily armed foot battalions, ranged in close order, their shields locked edge to edge. The cavalry, a mighty host of steel-clad warriors, under the King himself, formed the third line, and stretching beyond the infantry

right and left, served effectually to flank both wings. We should observe, indeed, that the superiority of the royal numbers was enhanced by its consisting chiefly of horse.

Mounted still upon his hackney, while a knight held ready the reins of his noble charger, the Monarch rode along his lines, and, by short and characteristic appeals, awoke the ardour of the troops for combat.

“ God and St. George ! hurl me this rebel-rout to Limbo lake ! what makes the villains here ? Are we not *King* ? *their King* ? the son of him who *was* their King ? What would my father’s nephew with the crown of my father’s son ? Now, by St. Luke’s face ! he that gets him honour in this fight gets him riches to boot, and a king for his debtor ! For I will make *this* day a feast in his remembrance ! What, ho ! who hath surveyed these traitors ? What banners be those even now flung abroad in the van ? Cousin of Norfolk, *thou* hast a quick eye for a far blazon.”

“ In the main front,” answered Earl Bigod, “ I see De Mowbray’s, the dragon with the crest and tongue of fire ; and near, upon either hand, De Vesco’s eagle, and the twin leopards of De Humphreville. Upon the left flank are the triple

turrets of Reginald de Lacy; and, upon the right, the old wolf's head of Hugh-le-Loup."

"Stout traitors all!" said the King, "and, yonder—midmost of their second line? ha, gentle coz?"

"The banner," replied Norfolk, "is De Albermarle's, a griffin crowned; but I take shame to tell your Grace the floating blazonry of the broad standard beyond—there are the *lions passant* of England in a royal shield!"

"Audacious villains!" cried Rufus; "and what rebel rags, I pray you, flutter along the wings?"

There was no answer; but Montgomery and Du Coci rode off towards either point, and returned speedily with intelligence.

"To horse, my liege," cried Sir Alberic; "if we set not upon them they will charge first! A thousand lances are in the rest—I see the banner of the wolf's head over the power of the Western Marches; and, as I live and breathe, there, too, is William de Aldery! I know him by the strange crested helm."

"He hath broken prison then," said the Monarch. "No matter. To thy stout lances, Du Coci! We will upon them! What! Shall we play the Christian King, and bid a herald cry pardon to such as rue their treason?"

"Upon my life, my Liege," said Bigod, " 'twill not be listened to. Yonder villains are minded rather to thrust through and to cleave down, than to seek grace, even were it offered!"

"They will fight like fiends in legion!" cried Montgomery, "now—upon the left wing—I see the banner of Bernard Newmarch; and, on the right verge of their second battle, the soaring falcon of De Tunbridge!"

"Why! we will be-smirch Sir Ilbert's trappings," said Rufus. "My horse! my horse! St. George! St. Michael! my lance, I say! and battle-axe!"

And now, while the Monarch mounts his impatient charger and gives his last directions, we will glance at the opposed lines; the more so, having mentioned, as within them, the banner of De Tunbridge, of whose escape the reader has yet had only a doubtful hint. *There*, however, appeared the falcon-banner, and the highly-adorned, half-fantastic armour of the Knight of the Falcon; and there, indeed, did he make no petty figure; his immense wealth and territorial power enabling him to bring into the field a very considerable body of well appointed troops.

"By Heavens!" exclaimed De Albemarle, apart to De Mowbray, "I have evil thoughts of De Tunbridge—I like not this wild vow of

silence ; when he should speak as blythe as May, and as loud as December ! — Why ! lo ye ! he rides like a thing of clay ! his very heart is dead within him ! ”

“ Peace ! ” said Northumberland, “ all is well. The glittering fool hath mettle in him when roused.”

“ Aye ! ” said De Albemarle, “ but roused will it never be for *this* day’s work ! I would to God he had been yet fast fettered in the New Castle, and any fat-brained squire of our array leading his power ! ”

“ If he blanch, or play false,” said Earl Robert, “ I will cleave him with my own battle-axe ! ”

“ I like it not ! ” continued De Albemarle. “ His squire tells but a doubtful tale, and much do I fear Sir Ilbert is bought and sold ! I will not trust him in the van of the fight ! ”

“ Why, we will shape pretence to hold him rearward,” replied De Mowbray, “ until better hearts and arms have stricken blows to shame him from this moping moodiness ! Leave him to me, I pray you. Who leads their horse ? yon vast body of men-at-arms, far stretching west and east beyond both flanks of foot ? their chargers are as black waves below, and their

plumes and pennons as white foam above! but my sight is thick and short."

"The King, himself, be sure," said Stephen, "I see his banner in its centre—himself yet rides in front of the archer-van—he upon the snow-white hackney. Look! he sends horsemen to peruse us! Montgomery one, by his huge bulk—they ride towards either wing——"

"Now, good my Liege," exclaimed De Mowbray, "give me the leading of this central host!"

"Take it! in the name of Him who gives victory!" cried De Albemarle, "and thou, brave Lupus," (as the Earl of Chester rode up at the moment in full panoply, attended by William de Aldery, Nigel of Halton, and his esquires——,) "right wing or left?—Choose, and away!"

"Choose ye, my Liege," answered Lupus, "for there are banners on both flanks that it will please me well to see the fangs of the Wolf tear from their staves!"

"Away, then, eastward!" said Stephen. "Be the right wing mine. God of battles!" he added, looking upward, "set before me our prime foe, Rufus himself, that with my own good lance I may win, full knightly and kingly, the sceptre for which we struggle!"

"Amen!" cried a portly Warrior behind, grasping a tremendous leaden maul, such as few modern divines, we fear, could heave up with their full strength; and having another most truculent-looking weapon, of the like skull-shattering order, slung at his saddle-bow; but without lance, sword, axe, dagger, or any sharp weapon whatever—

"Amen! amen! and, for mine own part, if I can tickle me Hugo de Montgomery's ear with this pretty feather, it shall content the meek modesty of a poor churchman's desires!"

"Truly, worthy Prior," said De Albemarle, "thou hast there a delicate riding wand! But what ails thee at bright steel, O thou of the church-militant?"

"Against the canon, my gracious Liege!" replied Baldwin, flourishing his club of Ascapart—"against the canon! It is not given unto us, that be men of peace, to put the blood of war upon the girdle that is about our loins! and, therefore, in meek humbleness of obedience, do I eschew the carnal weapon of bright steel!"

"Godly man!" exclaimed De Albemarle—"Thou say'st well! only it somewhat puzzles a sinful layman to guess how thou wilt knock out a score of men's brains and shed no blood!"

Howbeit, upon them, and make essay ! We will pay pence to Peter, but Urban shall forgive thee !”

“ To the charge, my Liege !” cried De Lacy, riding hastily up, “ the ranks of the foe are marshalled ; many a thousand arrows are under the belt, and there are lances lowering for career !”

“ Command the reserved horse, brave Reginald, in our main battle’s rear,” said Stephen, “ and so farewell ! Farewell, too, noble Lupus ! St. Hugh of Cluni strike with thee and thine ! For *thee*, princely De Mowbray !” he added, as the others rode off, “ Father, and Friend, and Councillor ! let there be no farewell betwixt us ! at *thy* glance such eagle-trust of victory sits upon my heart that it were scorn and mockery of the omen to name even the word farewell !”

“ Away, my Liege !” answered Northumberland, “ win or lose, we will fight this battle with twin hearts and souls ! Thy spear in rest shall be my signal to bid the archers shoot !”

Thus saying, De Mowbray returned the steely grasp of De Albemarle, and the latter then rode to where his banner waved in front of the right wing.

Both Hosts were now marshalled—every

leader under his banner—every knight under his pennon—every man-at-arms with levelled lance—every Bowman with arrow fitted ; and there was a brief interval of dread and portentous silence.

Almost at the same instant, De Mowbray and Milo de Miles gave their respective signals —then trumpets pealed, and nakirs resounded —a cloud of arrows darkened heaven and earth, and a shout arose from both armies which seemed to rend the summer sky from welkin to welkin, and to shake hill and plain beneath it ! It was the wild and fiend-like shout of defiance ! soon to be followed by that of rage and agony ; by the mingled roar of triumph, and of wrath, of fury, and despair !

It is not *our* province to detail the order and progress of combat with all the minutiae of tacticians, or the heavy formality of a bulletin ; but rather, with eager yet trembling finger, to direct the eye of imagination, as from some shadowy eminence, upon the waves of conflict rolling, rushing, and breaking at its foot, as the conflicting tides of ocean and a vast river rush and break upon the strand that trembles at their conflux ! To shew, through fearful vistas in the carnage-clouds that gather around, glimpses of the

havoc made far and wide beneath by the Rider of the Pale Horse, as he fills all bosoms with communal rage to glut his fury! glimpses of the dark picture drawn by a Cambrian Bard,* “the gushing of blood—the weapons of the heroes with gore fast dropping—men surrounded with terror—the crimson gash upon the chieftain’s brow—biers with the dead and reddened men—a tumultuous rushing together—combatants striving in blood to the knees—and ravens feasting on human prey!”

The sun shone with a blinding splendour full in the faces of the Royalists; and in the deadly exchange of arrow-flights which began the struggle, they were, consequently, the greatest sufferers.”

“Upon them with lance and bill!” exclaimed De Miles—and his whole line charged, under a cope of whizzing shafts, full upon their shooters; each Bowman discarding his first weapon, and grasping his bill or mallet; and the light horsemen that flanked them striving with their long spears to break the opposed phalanx, or with their axes to cut down the projecting stakes which defended its squares and columns.

* Llwarch Hen.

So fierce was the in-burst that, upon many points, it proved successful; and the first line of the rebel centre and left wing were driven back upon the second. These, however, the heavy-armed battalions of foot, stood like rocks of adamant against the shock; and would, perhaps, have cut the charging foe to pieces, had not Montgomery, marking the crisis with burning eye from afar, rushed with his corresponding heavy squadrons to support the almost defeated Constable, and so rendered the battle general along all the lines of infantry; while the main squadrons of barbed horse on both sides seemed to await the issue—the discomfiture of one or other—before throwing their own tremendous power into the scale.

Long and terrible was the struggle, for, “as Greek met Greek,” so the flower of English yeomanry was set in deadly array against itself! The trumpet sent its shrilling voice afar, and the hollow beat of the nakir, or kettle-drum, resounded from host to host; while shouts, and yells, and war-cries, and the shrieks of expiring horses, rose over all; amidst the clash of blade and shield, the ringing of axe and brand upon helmets, and the crash of lance and pike upon corslet and steel cap!

At length, the terrors of De Mowbray's battle-axe, which made gaps of slaughter wherever it arose and fell ; and the wild fury of the savage Borderers ; and of the stubborn dalesmen of Rede, and Tyne, and Wear, rolled back the broken tide of conflict upon the royal front ! Their array was shattered, many were slain and wounded, banners and pennons, thrown to earth, and confusion spread along the ranks so rapidly that scarcely all the energy and desperation of the Marshal, De Miles, and Du Coci, availed to keep it from swelling into panic and utter rout.

They fell back, at last, with a heavy loss, amidst the exulting cheers and thrilling war-cries of the enemy.

“ Now, by St. Luke’s face ! ” shouted Rufus, whose soul panted within him for the charge, “ they shake our columns ! they drive them to mid-field ! Darkness of Hell ! foot and horse upon both flanks wheel round to hem them in ! St. George ! St. Edward ! sound trumpets ! advance banner ! For thy life, De Baliol, ride to our cousin of Norfolk, and bid him charge upon their right wing, as though St. Michael were hurling Normandy upon England ! away ! Now, gallant Hearts ! my faithful Lieges ! my noble

Earls ! my trusty Barons and Knights ! upon them, in God's name and mine ! King William to the rescue ! ”

And the fiery Monarch dashed the rowels into his charger, and with about six thousand of his noblest chivalry (better or braver the world in arms could not have produced !) rushed in thunder over the field ; and fell, like the bolts of Heaven themselves, upon De Mowbray and De Albemarle, as the latter wheeled round in front to crush the already hard-pressed squadrons of the Marshal and the Constable !

The first fury of the charge seemed to defy the strength and courage of demi-gods ! Down went banner and pennon—horse and man ! And far into the gored and shaken ranks did Rufus and his princely nobles spur their mailed chargers, making a lane of dead and wounded with lance and sword, and mace, and battle-axe ! the King himself used one of the latter weapons, his great strength and activity making its every blow fall like death's own hand. No helm or mail could resist its crashing and tremendous dint ; and when the Monarch's eye fell upon De Albemarle, who, at some distance, fought with chivalrous gallantry, striking down every foe that dared the encounter, he cried his war-cry with fiercer

energy, and his blows descended more fast and terrible, to cleave a passage to the bosom of his rival.

Conspicuous by his daring, as by the royal banner, and by the crown upon his helmet-crest, Rufus was presently distinguished by De Albermarle ; and that gallant adventurer, nothing loth to put the struggle at once to personal arbitrement, strove hard to cut a way for their meeting. But the strife was not yet to be so decided. Between them a dense mass of raging combatants still fought with Norman fury and desperation ; many with uncouth, but deadly weapons, called morgansternes and oncins, staves with spiked iron balls, and with hooked axes ; the latter making deadly incision through the masclies of the linked mail. The knights had broken their lances to fit them for close combat ; the men-at-arms and esquires followed in the surging wake of their lords, striving gallantly to "win their spurs" upon a stricken field ; and every banner and pennon became the nucleus of a burning orb of conflict--to tear down those proud insignia, or to preserve them flying, and to slay or succour their defenders, being the great objects of mutual fury. Day wore on--but hours were as moments with the combatants--the sun poured

down a more intolerable heat and lustre—thick clouds of dust rose upon every hand—louder and hoarser grew the cries of aid and rescue—the fierce thrust and the cleaving blow were dealt deadlier and faster. Horses reared and fell, and with their plunging hoofs made brief the anguish of fallen riders. The groans of the dying, and even the yells of those whose deep wounds crimsoned the feet of their trampers, were heard no longer, amidst shriller clarions and the deeper beat of the drum, “the thunder of the captains and the shouting ! ”

Although the severest brunt of the royal charge fell upon the insurgent right wing, goaded to it by the banner of De Albemarle, its fury extended along the whole of the central front as well. But there, De Mowbray, whose lines were flushed with advantage, and re-arranged for the coming storm behind a fresh body of archers, made the new assailants pay dear for every foot of ground they maintained. Arrows flew upon them “as if it snowed.” The knights and men-at-arms rushed in firm phalanx—the Welsh foot plunged their long knives into the bellies of the steeds ; and, so great was the confidence inspired by De Mowbray’s presence, and almost superhuman

daring, that the eagle of victory seemed once more likely to sit upon his banner. He saw, however, that Stephen was pressed with increasing fury by the King, and, (knowing well the royal prowess,) feared the Earl's death or defeat, before succour could well be dispatched to him.

"Fly, good De Aldery!" he exclaimed. "Spur hard to the left wing—bring aid from Hugh-le-Loup, De Lacy or De Tunbridge!—Mark well whose banners are yet a-field."

The Knight gave rein and rowel to his steed; burst his way to rearward through the press, and vanished amidst the spears.—But he returned no more!

When the main royalist division of heavy cavalry first charged, before the Earl of Norfolk received the King's command, by Baliol, to throw his columns upon the left wing of the enemy, headed by Hugh Lupus, a great part of that division remained yet inactive. The archers, indeed, still poured their shafts in drifting volleys, but the chief squadrons of men-at-arms, and a large body of infantry were entirely out of action. Of these, both foot and horse, a great proportion formed the power of De Tunbridge, stationed by the jealousy of De Albemarle in the rear of that flank, with injunctions

to make no charge, or advance, without solicitation to that effect from one of the three great Earls. De Lacy, with his reserve of a thousand horse in the central rear, had like instructions, and awaited with burning impatience the summons which he trusted every moment would bring him to rush into the conflict. The Knight of the Falcon, on the contrary, seemed to preserve the moody coldness which from the first had rendered him suspected. The Squire who had escaped with him, stood, indeed, ready with charger, lance and axe ; and others were hurrying to and from the van with intelligence ; but, he still rode his hackney, and sent no couriers to any of the engaged leaders ; seeming, in fact, intent only to observe De Lacy, whose squadron lay at a little distance upon his right.

At last came the arousing crisis !

Hugh-le-Loup heard the thunder of the royal cavalry ; and, through the thick clouds of dust, caught sufficient glimpse of their fearful charge upon the centre and right wing. He sent a horseman at speed to bid De Lacy advance upon the ground he was himself about to quit—cried his war-cry, “ St. George for the Western Wolf ! ” and, with the flower of the Palatinate rushed headlong upon the Earl of Norfolk,

whose squadrons, at that moment, had also galloped for the charge.

Fierce and loud was the shock, and many a lance was shivered, and many a rider thrown ; but the advantage lay manifestly with LUPUS. He spurred his powerful horse full against BIGOD, and hurled him senseless from the saddle ; a result so disheartening to the Royalists, that, after with great difficulty regaining their leader's body, they seemed rather to fight for life than victory.

But there was a disparity of numbers little anticipated.

“ Now, by every saint and every fiend ! ” cried HUGH-LE-LOUP, “ yon treacherous villain, DE TUNBRIDGE, hath either fled the field, or joined the Tyrant ! Ride, ride, good NIGEL ! for thy life ! and bid DE LACY with his fresh horse charge on yon flank ! My earldom to a knight's fee the day will then be ours ! ”

Nigel obeyed, but his career was short. He saw the whole power of De Tunbridge, still in line, and still inactive, but with its front marshalled towards De Lacy. He saw the Falcon-leader in the war saddle, with lance in rest, and banner advanced. He heard a thrilling cry of onset, and then a loud exulting shout ; and in the next

instant, almost before he could wink twice, beheld the whole band of Reginald de Lacy scattered like hounds through which the stag charges when at bay; or, in the stronger language of the Prophet, like a rolling thing before the blast!

So fierce—so tremendous—so unlooked for, was the charge, that very many were driven pell-mell into the trenches cut for their security; and the Leader himself, taken, it must be confessed, at unawares, hardly escaped being hurried headlong amongst them. As for the amazed Nigel, equally stout of heart and thick of skull, he thought it decent and necessary to avenge thefeat upon its hero; and, rushing on for the purpose, was rewarded by a blow that cleft him from the crown midway to the chin!

First paralysed with astonishment, and then burning with fury, back, like a demon for his prey, came the Baron of Newark for revenge.

“White-livered Popinjay!” he cried, half choked with rage, “treacherous kite! I will repay thee! I will teach thee, poor painted kestril! to play the paltering haggard with Reginald de Lacy!”

“Black-hearted caitiff!” thundered the Knight of the Falcon, no longer either idle or mute, and

with a voice which the Baron well knew was not that of De Tunbridge, "I will repay thee! once for all, and with heaped hand! Doest thou not know me, slave of the great Devil!"

"The great Devil confound thee!" exclaimed De Lacy, reining back, himself greatly confounded! "Thou here! can it be possible?"

"I will teach thee to believe!" cried the Blue Knight, "this is not the cavern of Se-Blaca. Here thou canst not escape the penal scourge! I bless God thou hast no wings to fly from Him! from me! Robber and murderer! have at thee!"

And they closed in as fierce combat as ever rose from wrath and hatred betwixt man and man!

De Lacy was bold—determined—muscular. His antagonist was spare and slim. The Baron's heavy axe threatened with one blow to decide the strife. The Blue Knight wielded only the ordinary Norman sword; and yet none who had heard and looked upon the champions would have doubted the issue. In three minutes, De Lacy dropped heavily from the saddle with a deep wound betwixt the casque and gorget, the hood of mail beneath being no security against a blow so terrible as that which had fallen upon it.

"Oh, slay him not, Sir Knight!" exclaimed a Squire who saw the weapon point of the victor at his lord's throat ; "take ransom, and spare life!"

"Not for the world's riches!" cried the disguised Knight ; "This, *this!* for Constance de Mowbray!"

And as he spoke the last word, a deadly thrust accompanied it. One groan—one convulsive gasp—and the fierce spirit of Reginald de Lacy parted for ever! The death of their leader, and the shout of triumph which hailed it, completed the surprise and defeat of the rebel squadron of rescue. They fled for the most part without striking another blow ; and, hurrying fieldward in the greatest disorder, communicated their panic to the forces of the left wing still engaged with Bigod, and which only struggled against superior foes in expectation of succour from the very men now flying past or amidst them in utter rout and confusion ! Well and bravely until then had Hugh-le-Loup maintained the fight, and perhaps the lost reinforcement would have given him instant victory. Now, irremediable confusion spread along the lines ; and when the Conqueror of De Lacy rushed upon them with his exulting troops,

fresh and fiery as morning eagles, every banner and pennon fell or fled. The Earl of Chester was himself unhorsed and abandoned in the shock; and all that remained of his division were either slain upon the spot or hurried out of the field in total defeat—pursued—cut down—trampled over by the unsparing foe!

A body of Royalists, both foot and horse, who had remained to guard the great standard, seeing the rout, gladly joined the pursuing squadron; and bore a sanguinary part in the chase of slaughter that ensued.

The victor-leader, however, knew or guessed that Fortune showed another aspect upon the centre and right wing of the foe. He gave up the pursuit to the new comers, wheeled round his whole force, and swept with unabated fury into the thickest of the conflict; where, by this, De Mowbray had once more broken the lines of Rufus, and cooped the raging Monarch within a narrow circle of his bravest chivalry, who thus threw themselves between him and the fate they well knew he would rush upon in his desperation. Once had he struck De Albemarle's horse dead beneath him, and once, with a mighty but glancing stroke, cloven the helmet crest of the rider, and stunned him to the earth; but the

whirlwind rush of Northumberland to Stephen's aid again turned the current of fortune, and of battle.

Full in the van of those who fought stoutest for the King, and *had* done so through all the struggle, fought Alberic du Coci. Backed by his trusty Nicholas, and the remnant of his free lances, he did not (to use the quaint language of Saxon minstrelsy) "doze in the war-saddle, or strike drowsily with dull hand!" Though pained and weakened by a spear-wound in the left side, the brave knight cried his war-cry cheerily, and struck down every assailant, until encountered by *one*, against whom no champion of the royal host had stood that day without dearly abying it.

It was De Mowbray upon his foaming charger, black from the spur to the crest, with blood and dust, and still wielding the heavy war-axe as though the fight were but begun.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "St. George! St. Oswyn! Thou art the dishonoured villain Du Coci, and my long debt of blood and vengeance shall now be paid!"

"Take back the 'dishonoured villain,'" cried the Knight, "back in thy rebellious teeth! But I am that Alberic du Coci who, in past years,

dubbed thee the false traitor thou hast this day well approved thyself!"

"And I," said the fierce Northumberland, "I am that Robert De Mowbray who swore that if ever again thy foot pressed English ground, two moons should not fill and wane ere a death-mass was chaunted for thy soul in Durham aisles! Now—now is the fulfilling hour! the cup of trembling is at thy lip! Drink, villain, and die!"

His charger made but one bound—his fatal axe but once swung aloft and descended—and the work of hatred was done! the debt of long-hoarded vengeance was discharged. Strength, skill—a heavy opposing mace—wrought meshes of double mail—were all idle—all as grass to the sickle, against that one terrible blow! With its single energy it cleft the right arm of the victim down from the very shoulder almost through the whole limb! and the brave, the generous—the kind—the true-hearted Du Coci fell with a mortal wound.

"St. George! St. Edward!" shouted the vindictive Conqueror, and raised his hand for a stroke to make assurance doubly sure—when, at the instant—amidst shouts of rage and triumph—the shock of a heavy charge drove upon him,

irresistibly, horse and man, friend and foe, victors and vanquished ; and swept together, in one surging hurley of confusion, the fighting and the fallen, the wounded and the flying, the living and the dead !

It was the charge of the Blue Knight—of him who had slain De Lacy and routed Hugh-le-Loup, and who was now swooping with like victorious wing upon the main-battle !

His well known voice thrilled upon the ear of De Mowbray, and not even when Du Coci fell had the eye of the dark Northern warrior flashed with a gloomier fire ! He rose high in the stirrup to look around for this next and fast-approaching victim ; and saw, to his surprise, a banner charged with the national cognizance of the Saxons, the aleirion, or martlet, streaming from the right towards the quarter of the Blue Knight's attack ; as if the forces marshalled beneath it were bent to repel his onset. De Mowbray exulted in the timely aid—spurred furiously to clear the press, and cried his war-cry again and again to cheer his disordered band ; but his voice was drowned by one louder and fiercer, thrilling over all the roar of the strife—

“ *The Avenger of the Saxons* to the rescue !”

it thundered forth ; and then an arrow whizzed from a bow that never failed, and the great Earl fell back upon the arcon of the saddle, with the barbed point in his side, just where the plastron, or under corslet, ceased to protect it. A mist came over him. The battle reeled and swam—there was a fierce shout, and a cry of panic-terror, for the spirit of the rebels fell with their falling leader ; his bannerman dropped dead with a spear-thrust, and the instant the proud and far-cheering ensign of De Mowbray sank from its “pride of place,” all that remained of his late victorious troops fled in irretrievable rout and disorder, excepting here and there a little cluster of knightly and more determined spirits, that, side by side, or back to back, fought with the fury of despair, not for victory or life, but for revenge and honourable death.

One such heroic knot struggled for the shield and body of the fallen Earl ; but the victorious Raymond (for why affect longer mystery?) burst at last into the press, and saved once more (at least, for a little space) the little remaining life of Robert de Mowbray ! His charger’s hoof struck powerless the hand of De l’Epée, rising with a keen weapon to avenge his lord ; and

then, as the overpowered defenders fled, fell, or were taken, he sprang down and stooped over the body of the wounded.

He saw that the barbed shaft had pierced too deep to be withdrawn without occasioning instant death ; and, amidst all his triumph, turned with a heavy heart from the pallid face of him whom he had once so honoured, loved, and reverenced. He gave charge for the body to be conveyed gently to the rear, and promised a high reward to whomsoever should first procure surgical aid.

Cries and sounds of fierce conflict from the right wing hurried him again to the saddle, but, as his foot pressed the stirrup, he felt the detaining grasp of Nicholas de L'Epée, (how changed from his once light-hearted aspect !) and, looking down where the squire pointed, saw the prostrate, helpless, expiring Du Coci ; the seal of death upon his brow, and the turf beneath him a red swamp with his gore.

“Great God !” he exclaimed—flinging himself upon the earth beside the sufferer. “Is it indeed thus, brave Alberic ? art thou sore stricken ? Nay—speak to me gallant heart ! how fares it with thee ?”

“Cold,” answered the wounded Knight—“cold, dear Raymond—sick—feeble—dying !—but it

is well—passing well! better thus, a thousand times, than choked with the salt surf in yonder caverns. I die, like all my fathers, upon a well-stricken field, with the cry of victory for my death-hymn."

"Oh, be of cheer!" said Raymond, although with a heavy consciousness that he spoke idly—"thou shalt not die! we will have help—leech-craft—kindly tendance—I will nurse thee myself, as a mother would nurse her son!—arouse thee, Nicholas! for shame!" (he was holding water in a steel cap to his master's lip, and shedding tears into it as fast as rain-drops fall!) "Arouse thee, and prepare a litter!"

"A bier—a bier—" said the dying man, feebler and feebler; and his head dropped upon the bosom that strove to solace him. Raymond took the cold, powerless hand, and pressed it with poignant anguish—his heart sickened—his eyes gushed over with bitter tears.

Du Coci rallied a little once more. Faintly returning the pressure of his friend's grasp, he murmured in low tones:—

"I am sped. The broken lance is broken for ever. It's last splinter is hearth-fuel!—Tell me, Raymond—how goes the fight? how fares De Mowbray?"

"Sped too," replied Cœur d'Acier, "defeated—wounded—dying—a day of life is his best beast!—"

The Knight started convulsively, and seemed striving to rise. His eye was fixed. A little foam came to his lips, and, as they muttered something indistinctly, Raymond bent his ear close, and caught a few broken words—

"In Durham—holy Father!—Durham—a death-mass—he swore it—benedicite!"

They were his last accents. His head dropped as he uttered them; and, when Raymond again raised it, the gallant spirit was gone for ever!—

Let us quit this scene of individual death, and, allowing a little interval of renewed slaughter to elapse, "look, once more, ere we leave this specular mount," over the field of battle. It is covered with dead and dying—with abandoned arms and ensigns—with groups of flying wretches who have no hope but to save life—of savage pursuers who have no wish but to destroy it! Every column of the rebels is now broken and scattered. All the chivalrous daring of De Albemarle being in vain against the royal fury, when the banner of De Mowbray, like an extinguished beacon in a storm, sank from before them; and the cham-

pion who had first turned the fortunes of the day made his third and last charge upon their already wavering columns.

North, west, east, and south—to the towers of Bamborough—to the caverns of the sea-beach—to the wilds of Redesdale—to Tynemouth, and the forests of Tyne and Wear, the scattered wreck hurried as fast as wearied steeds, or their own wearied steps, could bear them ! Where now are the arrayed squadrons, and the fiery leaders, and the proud hopes, and the fierce energies of the morning ? Gone, with its mists and dews ! drowned in gore, or quenched in despairing flight !

“ Ambition, half convicted of her folly,
Hangs down the head, and reddens at the tale !”

Yon little cloud of dust rolling southward, with a few glimmerings of steel breaking through it, tracks the flying courser of De Albemarle himself, spurring, with a little remnant of his power, for Tynemouth. When all was lost, (after Raymond's last charge,) the would-be monarch flung the reins over his charger's neck, grasped his sword with both hands, and (not unworthy in spirit of a martial kingdom) was rushing into the thickest of the fight for revenge and death; but Hugh-le-Loup, unwounded and remounted,

although far behind his own routed columns, crossed the path of the Earl, seized the abandoned bridle, and hurried him from the field ; heedless in what direction, reckless of life, and seeing nothing but

“ Black-ravenous Ruin, with her sail-stretched wings ! ”

We snatch a glimpse of the conquerors—at a late hour, when wearied with pursuit and slaughter, and when the trumpet of recall had sounded—and then gladly close the blood-stained pages of battle.

“ Now, by the Mother of Heaven ! ” exclaimed Rufus, “ if Ilbert de Tunbridge hath indeed stricken this blow, he hath fed on strange meats these evil days—he is the serpent that hath eaten a serpent, and so sprung to a dragon ! ”

“ He slew De Lacy with one mighty blow,” observed a Baron who stood near.

“ I saw him scatter De Mowbray’s host as the wind scatters stubble,” said De Miles.

“ Aye, marry,” said Montgomery ; “ but he had wit to time it when a cloth-yard shaft was in Earl Robert’s breast.”

“ Not so, by St. Mary ! ” cried another, “ he charged ere the shaft sped, and was then within lance-length of the Rebel Earl.”

"Never again Rebel or Earl," said the King ; "but say—who hath news of the Traitor?"

"I, my Liege," said De Miles, "both fair and foul. He was prisoner to De Tunbridge, but, while conveying to the rear, rescued by the barly Prior of Tynemouth."

"A curse upon that meddling Book-a-bosom, with his huge mallet !" said Montgomery, "twice did he rally a band of beaten villains, crying aloud, in God's name, to fight like Saul and Jonathan, and to smite us hip and thigh, even from the rising to the going down of the sun."

"A gory twilight hath *their* sun-down !" said the King ; "and I will flay me the priest alive, to be a terror henceforth to all villainous peel-pates that betake them to club-law rather than the canon. But, ho ! by St. Luke's face, stand apart ! here, with a thousand laurels, comes the champion of the day, the marvellously changed De Tunbridge !"

Slowly riding up, the exhausted Raymond dropped, rather than alighted, from his founder-ing charger—knelt at the royal foot—removed the falcon-crested helmet, and throwing back the hood of mail, solved in one moment the whole enigma of poor Sir Ilbert's heroism.

Of those that, with eyes of amazement, wit-

nessed the transformation, some looked pale with envy—some black with malice—and the Red King himself ten times redder than usual with surprise and pleasure!

“Pardon, my gracious Liege,” said Raymond, “a pardon, if I have done well, for Ilbert de Tunbridge; with whose armour, banner, and forces, and by his own freely-accorded will, I have thus dared to play the masquer, and strike this blow for my royal Liege.”

“And, in the fiend’s name—” said Rufus, “where lies the gallant himself?”

“Fast in the dungeons of the New Castle; hostage that every leader of his power should obey *his* signet upon *my* hand. With that, and his trusted squire, and in his gay harness, I rode to the rebel-camp, pleaded a vow to my saint for needful silence, and passed, in very deed, with their whole host, for Ilbert de Tunbridge.”

“With a whole Host, and a whole Realm,” answered the King, “Thou shalt pass for a better man—better a thousand fold! Give me thine hand, Sir Varlet of many names and shapes! and, to the boot of Steel-Heart and Stormed Castle, arise Raymond de Mandeville, Earl of Essex! son of that Geoffrey de Mandeville who fought bravest of the brave at Hastings!

Hugo of Shrewsbury, our good and faithful Marshal, know this gallant for thy fellow Peer ; cut square his pennon with thine own hand, and look well that his title hath fair blazon. Now bid our Heralds ride over the field, and take we charitable thought for the dead—the dying—and the groaning wounded who may yet live. Bring me a written file of the chief dead—(ah ! brave Du Coci !)—blow trumpet yet again ! a tucket of recall. Down banner, and up tent ! here will we sup to night ; for, laud be to God and my stout Lieges ! I have this day won a brave field against a stubborn foe ! Up tent ! up tent ! By St. Luke's face, we will drink joy and health to Raymond, Earl of Essex ; and the curse of the churlish heart upon whoso gainsays his worthiness !"

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

"———, no more of this, so God you blesse,
Your tale annoyeth all this companie!"

Chaucer.

Exeunt Omnes !

THE Battle we have attempted to describe* was decisive, not only of the political struggle which caused it, but of the fortunes of all those for whom we have endeavoured to awaken interest or sympathy.

Nearly eight thousand of the rebel army lay dead upon the field, besides the wounded, of whom a great proportion had mortal hurts ; and the slaughter during the flight was very great. Of the remainder, though some fled to the castles still garrisoned for De Albemarle, the greater number was scattered over the kingdom ;

* It is a singular fact, and shameful to the monkish scribblers, that no History extant contains any account or even mention of this great Battle ! we supply the hiatus now, for the first time, upon the sole authority of the "Boke of Bebbanburgh."

every man, in his despair and confusion, shifting as he best might for himself.

The body of De Lacy was found just as he had fallen under the sword of Raymond; and, being thrown into the trenches behind, had brief and unhonoured burial with the promiscuous dead.

" By his grave, dishonour shall sit,
Ever, O ever !
Blessing shall hallow it,
Never, O never !"

Not far remote, upon the ground occupied by the left wing, De Aldery was also recognised, after a pile of dead had been dragged from above him; his noble features retaining to the last that deep melancholy which seemed now to have been prophetic of his early doom.*

The remains of Du Coci had been cared for by his trusty Nicholas; a mourner as deep and true, with all his levity, as ever wrapped himself in the inky cloke of more ostentatious sorrow. It was the first task of the Earl of Essex, immediately after recall from pursuit, and before either sleep or food refreshed him, to have the

* "Boke of Bebbanburgh." Vulgar Historians give another account of De Aldery's death.

body brought to his own tent, that the wolf, the vulture, and the raven might gorge upon meaner fare. When the Host was next morning divided into two bodies, one for the reduction of the more southern castles, Durham and Tynemouth; and the other, for the sieges of Alnwick and Bamborough; Raymond, upon being appointed to command the former, carried with him the relics of his friend, trusting to inter them in hallowed ground in one or other of the places to be reduced. This, as Alnwick and Durham both surrendered upon the first summons, he accomplished in the cathedral of the latter city; and the visitor who now wanders where “Saxon-Eadmer’s towers” look down, in monastic pomp, from their wooded throne, upon the lovely Wear girdling their base, may, perhaps, heighten an evening mood of gentle enthusiasm, by remembering, in his cloistered walk, that, amidst the nameless graves of the forgotten dead beneath, he paces, somewhere, over that which holds the shrunk ashes of “the brave, the generous, the true-hearted Alberic du Coci !”

Earl Raymond then marched to Tynemouth, and sat down before the fortress stubbornly defended by the Prior; as upon the northern

frontier, Bamborough was by Matilda. To the Monarch, however, as to our readers, De Mowbray was the great personal object in the first, and Constance in the latter.

The fate of Hugh-le-Loup, as it was comparatively gentle, may soon be told. He was taken in the pursuit, and, upon submission to the Monarch, and payment of three thousand marks as a fine, returned at once to his allegiance and to his western fastnesses, "a sadder and a wiser man."

De Albemarle, hurried off the field, as we have described, when the battle was totally lost, escaped, during their flight, by sheer desperation of combat, from the band of Royalists that made prisoner the less desperate and less active Earl of Chester. Hard chased by his pursuers, the unfortunate Stephen fled to the sea-shore, secreted himself for a day and a night amidst its caverns, and, at last, reached Tynemouth in a fishing boat, haggard with toil, with loss of blood, with thirst, hunger, and ruined hope.

In the castled monastery, (no longer

"*Within, a palace, though without, a fort,*")

he found De Mowbray upon his death pallet, still breathing the difficult breath of parting

life ; but how changed from the haughty noble—the stately courtier—the dreaded warrior, who, but two days before, could wield half the energies of an empire, and strike a fearful, though unavailing blow, against the most warlike Monarch in Europe !

What De Albemarle, however, beheld and heard, he shall himself relate, when, upon the following night, favoured by storm and darkness, he eluded the watch and ward of both besieging Hosts, and suddenly presented himself before Matilda at Bamborough.

“ Fallen Prince ! ” she exclaimed, “ if it be not a mockery to call thee even *that*,—where is my lord ? How fares it with De Mowbray ? ”

“ Ill ! never worse with mortal man ! sick—helpless—dying in his beleaguered castle. His sun is set ! ”

“ And thou,” said the Countess, her cheek turning deadly pale, “ why art *thou* here ? ”

“ To bid thee,” answered Stephen gloomily, “ spare slaughter that avails not—yield the castle—make peace with Rufus ! ”

“ Yield ! ” exclaimed the fiery Matilda, “ yield ! Saints of Heaven ! when ? wherefore ? Tell me *that*—who gives command ? Is’t *thou*, spiritless fugitive ? ”

"Insulting woman! No!" replied the Earl, "nor here, nor upon other spot of English ground, hath Stephen de Albemarie now a voice of command! I go—if my tyrant cousin seize not upon me—to the Holy Land, to strive for the sepulchre of Christ. Such is, at last, the only warfare that would not demean him who has thus battled for a kingdom. *I* nor command, nor counsel thee to yield this castle. It is the hest of De Mowbray—wilt thou obey it!"

"When its towers are sand-heaps!" said Matilda; "when the besieging Host pours through the breach we cannot man—when famine hath stripped us to the skeleton-ghosts of defenders—*then* shall Rufus of England call Bamborough his—but not *till then*, unless it be mine to name at pleasure the terms of yielding."

"This," said Stephen, "is the madness of obstinacy, and not heroic firmness. What terms canst thou demand that he, the flushed conqueror, will deign to grant?"

"Full pardon for De Mowbray—his wealth—his rank—his power—his friends unscathed—these, or defiance to the death! There was a Countess once, Emma de Guader, that from the walls of Norwich defied the father of this tyrant, until his pride was quelled, and, with spread

banner, the defending host passed from its towers, whither they listed. *Her* spirit is mine.. So will I keep *these* towers ! their walls shall be my couch—my prison—my grave ! or I will have pledge from the King of life and fortune for my lord."

" For thy Lord's life," said the Earl, " make plea with the King of kings, or not beyond the dragging of twelve wretched hours will it endure ! I tell thee, Lady, if thou wouldest look upon him alive, fly with me even now, under 'vantage of this stormy darkness, to Tyne-mouth—there gaze upon the wreck that *was* De Mowbray ! his mail changed for a Benedictine gown—his helmet for a hood—his hauberk for a scapulaire—his lance and shield for a missal and a breviary. Gaze upon *all this*, and then strive or yield as ye list."

Matilda clasped her brow with both hands, like one whose every mental faculty is stunned by an intolerable blow !

The picture of De Mowbray's degradation, from the hero to the monk, appeared to her ardent and tameless spirit, so dreadful—so revolting, that it was as if shame and obloquy had fallen heavily upon *her* also, until, by a burst of passionate invective, she had vindicated, to her-

self, as well as to De Albemarle, her exemption from such a blot.

“Great God!” she exclaimed, “did I for *this* link heart and hand with one whose life and fortunes trembled upon a cast? to see him, when the stake is lost, lose with it all pride of heart and will—all manly wish or thought to do or dare! O Heaven! O Earth! a thing of books and beads—of stripes and penance! The warrior and the prince sunk—humbled—abased to the whining monk! Go! thou that hast yet some sparkle of knightly fire, take comfort to the fallen—such comfort as Matilda de Aquila can send to the *Monk* de Mowbray! Take him that puling thing, his nun-like daughter, meeter for a cloister than the throne thy folly had shared with her! Bid him, to *her* care confide his shameful sorrows—upon *her* sickly spirit pour out his own, in kindred feebleness! For never more upon earth shall he behold the *nobler* woman, whom, by this monstrous self-abasement, he hath wronged and ruined! O! how unlike, in his priestly garb, *that* Earl of Northumberland, who, when sickness wasted him, tore the quoif from his brow—the nursing-vesture from his limbs, and, in steel harness, hauberk and helm, and plastron; with shield and lance in his grasp,

and his spread banner above him—died like the hero of a hundred fields; full knightly, full nobly! I tell thee, Stephen of Albemarle! I had rather have been the widow of that Saxon, buried alive in his grave, than lived the wedded wife of De Mowbray, to be thus shamed and shunned!"

The indomitable Matilda kept her word. She dismissed Constance with De Albemarle, through a secret postern in the seaward battlements—while yet favoured by night and storm. She held out the castle against all the power and threats of Rufus. She never again looked upon the fallen De Mowbray.

We leave the Monarch to build his fort of Malvoisin against Bamborough; and once more change the scene to Tynemouth, closely invested by Earl Raymond.

It was night, in the magnificent church of the monastery—another night of raging blast and driving rain, with the added terrors of lightning and loud thunder; the intervals of whose turret-rocking peals were filled by the scarce feebler roar of ocean, breaking tremendously below, and sending its spray over the highest towers.

The rite called the *Nocturnal* was closed, but

a little group of varied figures glimmered in the beam of the tapers that lit the tomb of King Malcolm and his son, slain near Alnwick, by De Mowbray. *That* De Mowbray, the conqueror of a king—the terror of two realms, is the ghastly figure recumbent upon the marble slab below, wrapped in the black vestments of a Benedictine, and with the seal of death upon his brow ! Look, Moralizer upon human vanity ! look upon *that* tomb, and upon him for whom a tomb now gapes ; and cry with the Northern Minstrel—

“ Oh ! fading honours of the dead !
Oh ! high ambition lowly laid ! ”

Kneeling upon the cold floor, chafing the colder hands of the dying—stooping over him, like a pitying seraph, to wipe the clammy brow, and catch the feebly-whispered word—need we say *that* form of bending loveliness is Constance de Mowbray ? The armed figure at her side is De Albemarle ; and, near him, extending a crucifix, the Prior kneels, to bid peace be to the parting spirit.

Hours wore away over the melancholy group that still kept place and sorrow, while the sufferer still drew his miserable breath.

Sudden—far-thrilling above the roar of the storm, they heard a cry—a shout ! and then the

voice of trumpets and nakirs, and screams and yells, and a hundred mingled sounds of rage and terror, and conflict ! The besiegers had surprised a tower while the storm raged fiercest. De Albemarle, sword in hand, shot along the aisles, but was met by Elfin Puckfist, wild with terror, and pointing distractedly to the thick gloom of the portal arch—then came a gush of torch-light, and a warrior at the head of a strong band of men-at-arms broke into the chancel :— It was Raymond.—Stephen rushed upon him ; dealt a blow which shivered his own weapon in his grasp, and then stood defenceless, at the mercy of his uninjured foe.

“ Strike not ! nor advance !” exclaimed Essex to his followers—then, to De Albemarle—

“ Against *thy* life I have no weapon—nor bar against thy freedom ! Fly, whither thou wilt, —yet lead me first to De Mowbray—ah ! noble Earl !”—and, throwing himself beside the dying man, he cast but one glance upon his pallid face, and buried his own in his mailed hands.

The lamp of life lit up De Mowbray’s spirit with an expiring flash. He raised himself in the arms of Constance, and, as she hung over him, conjured her to take an oath for the peace of his parting soul, ere his cold ear was deaf for

ever. She gave solemn promise to comply—and then, with a voice such as might have issued from the tomb above, Earl Robert worded for her repetition a form of terrible imprecation upon her head, if ever *Constance de Mowbray gave her hand in marriage to a vassal of the Tyrant William!*

“Oh, Constance! swear not!” exclaimed Raymond—his sympathy for the dying yielding to alarmed affection, and to so terrible a blow at his own dearest hopes. But it availed not. She cast upon him a heart-renouncing look of agony, and, holding up her Father’s bloodless hands during the sacrifice, gasped out the fearful oath.

The young Earl bent to the earth under the infliction; and was only roused by a quick and bitter sob from his fellow-victim. He looked up—De Mowbray was dead on the chancel floor.*

That night parted for ever Raymond, De Albemarle, and Constance.

For the latter a royal order quickly arrived,

* “*Bale of Bebbesbury.*” The ignorant monks, followed by Hume and others, give other and various accounts. Some say that the Earl died a prisoner in Windsor Castle—some a shaven monk in the Abbey of St. Albans. We cannot doubt our own authority.

and was as quickly obeyed, that she should set out for the Convent of Nunna Mynstre, and await in its dim solitudes the Monarch's further commands.

The Earl of Essex kept faith with his fallen rival. He led him by the private postern down to Prior's Haven, and saw him, accompanied only by his faithful Dwarf, embark upon a stormy sea, from a kingdom which he had shaken to its very centre.

Soon after Raymond learned the safe arrival of the vessel in a Flemish port ; but nothing more of De Albemarle, until his own steps were upon a far-foreign strand ; until, in short, availing him of the King's reluctant license, immediately after the fall of Bamborough, and the consequent extinction of the last spark of rebellion, he had himself bade a long farewell to Britain.

With Nicholas de L'Epée as his chief squire, he joined the crusaders under Robert of Normandy, and strove, in the whirl of battle, to drown the bitter remembrance of Constance and of his ruined hopes. It was then that he heard of Stephen de Albemarle as fighting gallantly under the banner of King Philip, and likely, in the fields of the Holy Land, to lay the founda-

tions of a better kingdom than any less sacred warfare could have won for him in Europe.

Meanwhile years rolled away, and Constance (whom, to the surprise of many, the King never molested with threats of any alliance, although he forbade her to take the vows), hid her loveliness under the veil, and her nearly broken heart in the silence of a cloister. Sometimes, even to the secluded cells of Nunna Mynstre, the name of Raymond Earl of Essex came linked with many a eulogium upon his chivalrous conduct and lofty and generous nature. But, at last, rumour itself died away; and only sad conjecture remained, when the Lady Abbess, more bigoted than ever, spoke of some great victory won by the army of God over the usurping Moslems.

We have now brought the structure of our Drama to that point where the key-stone alone is wanting, and, before briefly supplying it, must again premise the lapse of several years from the period of De Mowbray's death.

As the steed to its starting post—as the hare to its form—as the mariner to his port—as the

:streams of Calypso's Isle, back, after many windings, to their source,—we return to Hampshire —to the bosky wilds of “Ytene”—to the leafy solitudes of “Boldre-Wood.”

Jerusalem had fallen to the Crusaders. Many of these had hurried back to their western homes, and in the forest-glades where our *last scene* opens, a Red-Cross Knight was riding pensively upon his return, attended only by a single squire; his retainers, of other grade, who had escaped disease and the scimitar in Palestine, being yet in a foreign port.

The golden eye of Morning had opened broad and bright upon the Travellers, and darting through many a lovely vista, gave emerald brilliance to the dewy sward and mosses upon their path; tinged with hues of fiery splendour the stems of oak, and elm, and beech; and lit up with autumnal glory their waving masses of foliage. There was a laughing joyousness over all the woodland, and the few sounds that were heard, seemed all in jocund accordance with its aspect; the crowing of chanticleer from distant hamlets, the murmur of insect myriads, the song of the soaring lark, and last, not least, the varied sounds of *the chase*; the cheering of hound and courser, and the merry notes of the horn.

"St. Hubert!" exclaimed the Knight, "either there be bold outlaws in these woods, since thou and I last rode in them, good Nicholas, or King William himself rides fast and far this merry morning, in the wake of a gallant stag!"

Just as he spoke, a gallant stag indeed bounded past them down a cross glade of the forest; a greyhound followed in full career, and then a rider, whom the Earl of Essex immediately recognised as Sir Walter Tyrrell of Pontoise, a zealous huntsman, and a noted hero of bow-craft in that primal day.

Earl Raymond and his squire drew bridle to mark who followed. The stag, doubling almost at the instant, swept again across their path, while a horseman, superbly mounted and equipped, and whose form, complexion and voice, there was no mistaking, dashed over a thicket, and, leaping from the saddle, fitted an arrow to his bow with surprising celerity. Just then, a shaft whizzed from another point, and, glancing from a tree, struck—neither a stag nor a king, but simply the green sward it fell upon.

"Ha! by St. Luke's face!" cried the dismounted Rufus, and discharged his arrow with unerring precision; but, at the very moment, *another*, with aim still more deadly, came from

an unseen shooter behind, and pierced him to the heart !

“ Saints of Heaven !” cried Raymond, leaping from his saddle, as the body dropped near him, without an effort, a struggle, or a groan, “ the King is slain !”

“ Not by *my* shaft, I call God to witness,”* cried the terrified Knight of Pontoise, bursting into the path and lifting his own harmless missile in attestation, and then throwing himself beside the luckless Monarch, who was indeed quite dead, with the arrow nearly through his whole body.

There was a rustling stir amongst the trees behind, and a sound resembling hoarse laughter, half-suppressed, followed by the beating of horse’s hoofs.

A light broke upon Essex and his Squire——

“ To horse and chase !” cried the former, and each springing to his saddle, darted into headlong pursuit ; De l’Epée taking a path which promised career of *interception* by the cross-glades, and the Earl himself following that which brought him speedily in the traces of the fugitive.

The latter, driven to bay, drew bridle in mid-

* Boke of Bebbanburg.

flight—fitted an arrow to his bow, and shot it with unfailing skill at his pursuer. Good cause had Raymond to bless the “cunning work” of the Milanese armourers, when the long keen shaft struck fairly through the linked hauberk to the steel corslet beneath, with a force which nothing but solid and well-wrought plate could have resisted ! But it *was* resisted, and before the archer could make second trial, his enemy flung upon him (with the precision and dexterity of long practice against the Saracens) a mace of iron, that struck him from the saddle without power to rise or resist further.

“Thou Saxon devil ! thou murderous caitiff!” cried the furious Raymond, his foot upon the breast, and his keen sword at the throat of the fallen, “long years have not saved thee from my commissioned hand—my treasured vengeance ! Behold the hour ! the minute ! and the weapon ! look up ! ‘tis I ! Raymond de Mandeville !”

Se-Blaca looked upward with a scowl and glare of inextinguishable hatred ; only muttering, betwixt his grinded teeth,

“Accursed ! accursed ! oh ! that I had stabbed or strangled thee at Marston ! But *let* my hour come !” he added in other tones, “I have wrought out my mission in all save *thee*—I have avenged

a thousand and a thousand wrongs ! Rejoice ! children of the fallen race ! Rejoice, Saxons ! your Tyrant is no more !—*this* hand—the hand of a Saxon, hath destroyed him !”

“ And *this*,” said Raymond, “ the hand of a Norman, shall avenge him—thus !”

He plunged the sword into the wretch’s throat, and then, turning immediately, rode back to the royal corpse, leaving to beasts and birds that of the long-dreaded and far-famed Avenger of the Saxons, Wolfsic-se-Blaca !

Raymond found the body of “ the Red King,” deserted ; Sir Walter Tyrrell, with little trust in his innocence, having, as every body knows,* “ put spurs to his horse—hastened to the sea-shore—embarked for France, and joined a body of the crusaders.”

It remained only for the Earl and his Squire to hurry on to Winchester, and obtain befitting conveyance of the dead ; but, before reaching the White City, not only was their object anticipated, by some poor charcoal-burners, who flung the body into their cart, after stripping it naked, but Raymond encountered a party of the royal

* But (as every body, perhaps, does *not* know) protesting vehemently afterwards, with solemn oath, to the Abbot Suger, that he had no hand, even accidentally, in the death of Rufus.

hunters, amongst whom was Prince Henry, surnamed Beauclerk, and who, upon receiving the very welcome news, soon found other and more important missions for the Earl of Essex than the obsequies of a dead king.

And now, why should we play the “strong-tedious talkers,” and lengthen out a narrative, of which the crowning event may readily be guessed :—

Who does not immediately perceive, that Raymond Earl of Essex was no longer “*a vassal of the Tyrant William?*” that Constance de Mowbray was therefore no longer bound by a cruel vow to waste her youth and beauty in a convent, when the noble, the brave, the generous and virtuous object of her first and only love, esteemed and favoured by the new Monarch, threw himself imploringly at her foot ?

They were united soon after, in the Ealden Mynstre of the White City. Archbishop Anselm, recalled from unmerited exile, performed the holy rite ; the *clerkely* King acted himself as sponsor to the Bride, and Sir Nicholas de L'Epée graced the ceremonial in all the virgin glories of new silk baldric and *gilded spurs*. It was a festal day throughout all Winchester. Even Jodesac *cum Barbâ*, “ rejoiced and was

exceeding glad !” and gifted the bridal pair with caskets of such jewellery as might have blazed with admiration upon the nuptial garbs of Soldans and Sultanas. Lastly, the holiday-keeping multitude flung up their caps, and drank treble healths, and swore by more saints than any calendar has brought down to us, that never had Bride so lovely, or Bridegroom so noble, passed from the portal arch of Ealden Mynstre !

Our remaining actors, whose fate we have not yet related, may now soon be disposed of.—

De Tunbridge, pardoned by Rufus, at Raymond’s solicitation, continued from that time a loyal subject; and, through all the reign of Henry, hawked and hunted with more zest, and dressed and danced with more coxcombical gallantry than ever.

Montgomery, the grim Marshal, fell like his late master, by an arrow, but it was upon the battle field, while bravely defending the Isle of Anglesea against Magnus, King of Norway, who also fell in the struggle.

Flambard, the fierce and facetious Minister of Rufus, was rewarded by that King’s grateful successor, Henry, with a pension of two shillings per day, in the solitude of a strong prison. He contrived to break from this well-deserved incar-

ceration, but it was only to perish in greater misery.

Matilda, the lion-hearted, met at last with her match. She married Nigel de Albini, to whom Henry had given all the lands of De Mowbray, and who, it appears, took the freedom, one pleasant evening, to shut up his gentle Countess in a certain grim tower, grated, walled and moated, "conform;" from whence it was never known either that she had the wit to escape, or how the fierce spirit endured a doom so galling and so wretched.

And now, when we have said, in good old story-telling wise, that the Earl and Countess of Essex lived long and happily, and bequeathed to their country a line of gallant Nobles, surely, we may take leave of our kind readers, in the full spirit of Spenser's cheering philosophy—

" After long storms and tempests overblown,
The Sun, at length, his joyous face doth clear,
So, whenas Fortune all her spite hath shown,
Some blissful hours at last must needs appear!"

THE END.

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